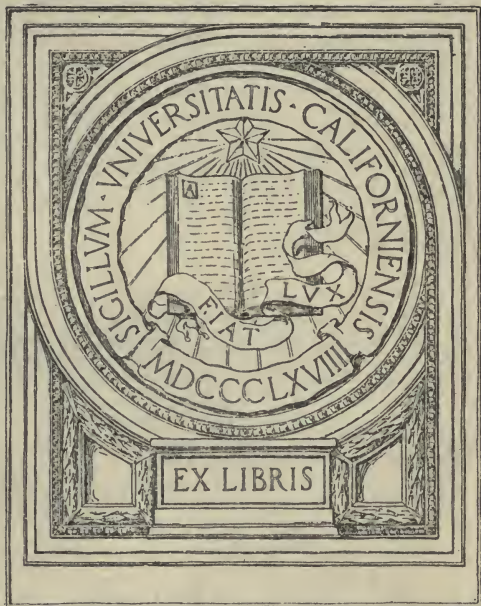


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THE

BOOK OF
CAVALIERS

CAVALIERS OF THE CROSS:

A HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

W. W. FOSDICK.

Second Edition.

CINCINNATI,
H. M. RULISON,
QUEEN CITY PUBLISHING HOUSE,

1855.

Gift of Miss W. H. Mills

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TO MY SISTER

JULIA DEAN,

THIS LITTLE ROMANCE IS DEDICATED;

IT IS A GARLAND WOVEN BY THE FAIRY, FANCY;

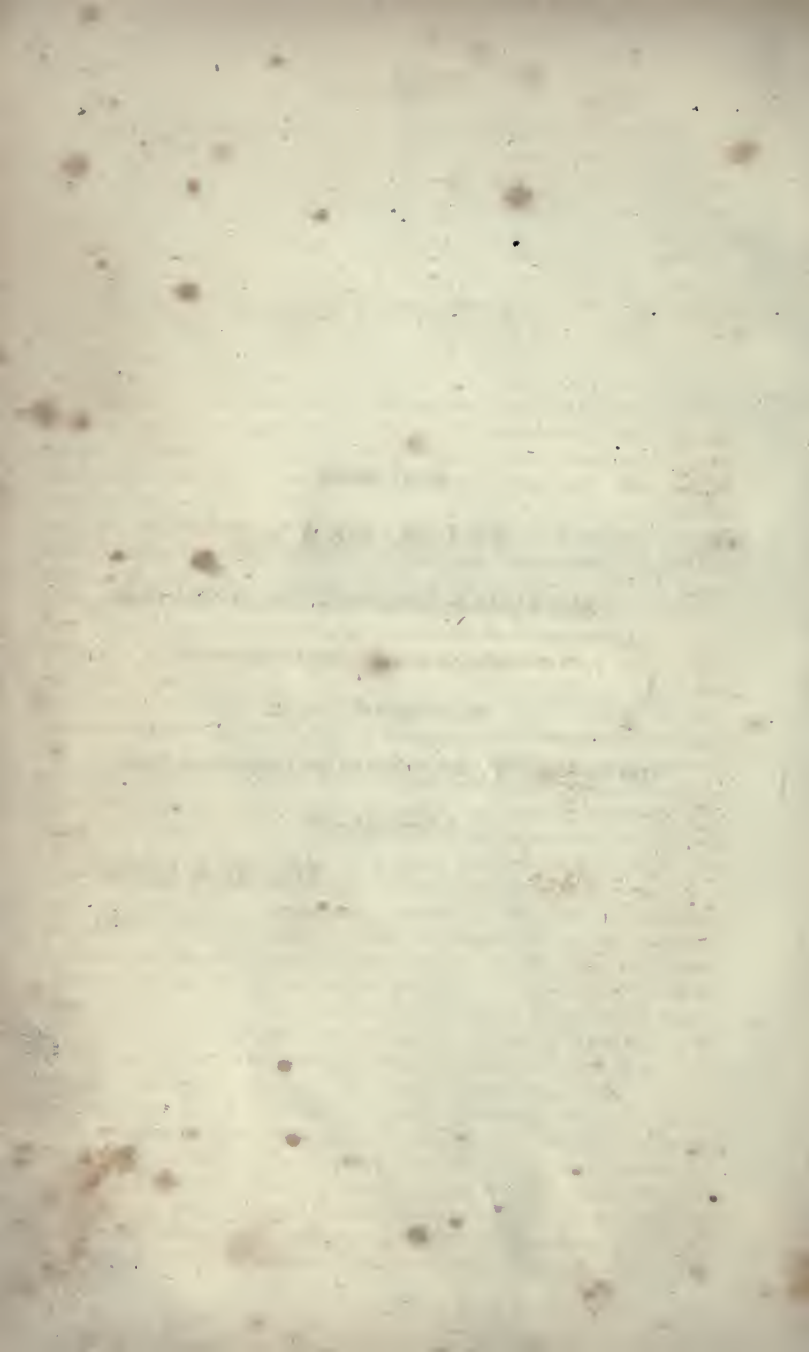
AND AT THY FEET I LAY IT,

WITH THE AMARANTH, THAT BLOOMS ON THE BANKS OF THE HEART—

A BROTHER'S LOVE.

WILLIAM W. FOSDICK.

(iii)



INTRODUCTION.

TIME, like distance, lends enchantment to the view, and the pictures of the past, seen through the mellow light of centuries, become soft and beautiful to the sight, like the shadowy outlines of far off mountain peaks, whose purple heads half hide themselves behind a screen of clouds. From the ruined temples of Rome, and the sacred groves of Greece, the voice of Genius has, time and again, called forth the spirits of Truth and Fiction, who have walked those sequestered valleys and retired shades, hand in hand, since the hours when Socrates spoke his words of wisdom, and Sappho sang her wild and witching lays; and though a thousand feet have trod the Arcadian vale, yet still its flowers are ever fresh, its forests green and glorious, and old Olympus, with his snow-clad crown, is yet the majestic monarch unshorn of his grandeur, and from whose iron-armed oaks the rushing wings of Time have not swept a single leaf into the stream of history, but has floated away to posterity stamped with its own story, a frail, but imperishable chronicle, to tell of Greece forever!

But there is no Genius presiding over the mighty world of the West; no nymph rises from America's translucent lakes; no satyrs drink their wine and hold their revels with fauns upon her hills, nay not the very violet whose tear-filled eye of azure gazes modestly upon the moss, has ever known the tiny fairies to collect under the canopy of its emerald leaves, nor the little elfin people to sing their songs in the moonlight by the side of her silver streams. But yet the thoughtful traveller, in his wanderings in this mis-called New World, will alight upon spots in the deep recesses of the forest, where the gigantic Spirit of Mystery throws from his dark and extended wings a perpetual twilight upon the wilderness, and guards the sacred secrecy of the place from the inquisitive eye of man.

Of these places none are more remarkable than those spots where the ruins of Copan, Palenque, and Tula, stand like so many statues with their extended hands pointing to a wreck from whence a people has "mysteriously and silently passed away;" the dumb indexes from whom no answer can be drawn; the speechless marbles which cannot tell the history or fate of those who reared them; the moss-grown monuments, which stand skeleton like; the organic remains of the past; the petrified survivors of a lost race, like the fabled inhabitants of the city in the Arabian Nights, whose queen turned her subjects to stone by a word: Here is a wreck, in following out whose

silent and subterranean labyrinths, conjecture loses itself; and here is the scene where, following the footsteps of his fancy, one may chance to see the Spirit of Romance as it glides among the ruins, and hear the echo of long-lost voices speaking from the hollow depths of the buried temple and the broken arch.

At the very entrance of this home of Mystery, Truth halts, her staff finding no firm foundation for her foot, and gazing into its dark and shadowy sphere she grows bewildered, and turns once more to the clear, bright scenes of certainty. Therefore, with the light-footed Fancy must we enter these hallowed realms of antiquity and imagination; treading softly through the sacred aisles of her mysterious temples and their tombs, lest we awaken the wrath of the angel that guards the silent sleepers; lightly lifting the ancient volume which holds their code of laws, lest in our rude haste to brush away the dust, it crumble in our hands. And gently must the chords of her long silent harp be struck, or perchance it will jar discordant, and be snapped in twain forever.

Then by the beautiful margin of Tezcuco's Elysian lake must the Spirit of Fancy stand and gaze upon the glassy waters, and see mirrored in its depths a shadowy reflection of the cities of Mexico and Tezcuco, as they stood some five centuries since upon the opposite banks of the same lake.

But, alas! the faded glories of that golden age can never be revived; no magic spell can conjure up a clear, consistent history; things can but be seen as in a dream, a fairy pageant, wherein the men are as shadows passing; ghosts, which must be reanimated, and made to enact an imaginary drama of their own existence. The beings of to-day must be forgotten, and the people of the past must fill their places; the present fabrics on the sites of these cities must pass away, and from out their sepulchre of ages, the ancient palaces must rise, not dark with mould, nor green with moss; not crumbled by the canker of decay, but bold and beautiful, the polished masses of masonry which belonged to the most enlightened race of the West. The empire of the Aztecs (by whom the three states, of Mexico, Tezcuco, and Tlacopan, under the general name of Anahuac, was holden), lasted about two hundred years, when it was conquered by the Spaniards under Cortes, being the same territory which had been possessed by the Toltecs, a race that passed mysteriously away, leaving a multitude of monuments which marked them as a mighty and wonderful people who never, according to historians, stained their altars with human blood, nor debased their banquets with the still more horrible custom of cannibalism, as was the case with their Aztec successors, and also to a certain, but much smaller extent, with the Tezucans. The Toltecs who disappeared so mysteriously and unaccountably, were in all probability, the founders of those vast cities whose solid superstructures of stone, and giant works of architecture, rival in beauty and magnificence, even in their ruins, the mighty wrecks which lie scattered in the desert sands of Egypt: but whence these Toltecs came, or whither they have vanished, must remain forever an inscrutable secret; all that we know, is that a wonderful race, far advanced in civilization, once

held their home in the great valley of Mexico; but when we seek to know their habits and their history, an unseen hand is stretched forth, and an impenetrable curtain of clouds is drawn across the sun of their glory, and we are left standing in double darkness, without a star to light the pathway of our wanderings.

He who would have seen the Aztec empire in its prime, should have stood, about the beginning of the sixteenth century, upon some pinnacle of that mountain wall which fences in the matchless vale of Mexico; from such a height he might have seen the fair lake of Tezcuco, that miniature salt sea, and the fresh tide of Chalco the sweet water, with other bright sheets of silver, shining along the valley for seventy miles. Into this vale the Aztecs descended in 1325; they had wandered from some far country to the north, and having borne a thousand toils, saw at last, upon the margin of lake Tezcuco, a fair omen, which told them that their pilgrimage was finished; it was an eagle holding a serpent in his claws, as he sat upon a cactus, or nopal. Here, amid the reeds and upon the salt marsh, they laid the foundation of an empire, which, in an existence of three hundred years, rose to the pitch of occidental grandeur with a rapidity unparalleled. Upon the islands of Accocolco, whose bog-like character required them to bring stone from the main land, they planted the first rude huts which were to shield that homeless race from the opulent tribes around, into whose territory they had penetrated, and upon whose *terra firma* they were not allowed to rest. Years of privation, misery, and hardship, rolled by, and the huts of the wanderers became safe habitations, and handsome houses: the miry marsh was now the firm foundation for solid superstructures, and the arms of the Aztecs had made the name of the poor wanderers among the water-flags a thing for terror and respect. By the beginning of the sixteenth century their sway extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the region of the barbarous Otomies upon the north, to the farthest limits of Guatemala upon the south; their language was spoken by seven tribes in and around the great valley; they were the Sochimilcas, Tepanecas, Colhuas, Tlahuicas, Mexicans, and Tlascalans; the latter tribe threw off their allegiance, and repulsed, by repeated defeats, the other six tribes, and established themselves as an independent republic, some seventy miles from the city of Tenochtitlan, or Mexico, where they remained the rivals for years, and ultimately became the cause of the final overthrow and downfall of the Aztec power.

It was a glorious view from the mountain heights in the opening of the sixteenth century, to see this Eden-like valley surrounded by a chain of porphyritic mountains, whose purple heads in the distance, through the unclouded atmosphere, seemed to lean against skies of pure ultramarine; far away to the south-east Popocatepetl, though distant more than thirty miles, shot its shaft of snow, like a shining spear, high and glittering into the bright blue skies; and hard by his side, in her spotless shroud of a thousand years, stood Iztaccihuatl, the white woman, his silent partner, who with him overlooked the land; the speechless watchers of centuries in their flight to Eternity!

It was a rare sight to gaze upon those lovely lakes with their Elysian islands, and forests filled with flowers floating upon the waves; gardens riding at anchor upon the tide, or moving away upon the waters like a Nautilus in full sail: for the grass, with its matted roots, and the thousand kinds of tropical plants and herbs, here wove together their fibres and formed a network, which caught the decaying portions of a luxuriant vegetation, and was perpetually forming a new mould, from which sprang up innumerable plants and trees; and this soil became so fertile and firm that the Aztecs found it invaluable for culture; and in the midst of these swimming groves the broad leaves of the maize, and other crops, fluttered in the ever temperate air which fanned that delightful region. Scattered over the lake, the fishermen in their canoes pursued their peaceful calling, and the crafty fowlers laid their nets and snares for the myriads upon myriads of aquatic birds which frequented the grass, the reeds, and the flags, which grew in and upon the borders of those saline marshes; and others might be seen catching certain snails, and water-flies, the eggs of which latter were esteemed a delicacy in those days, as the famous birds' nests are at present with the Chinese. In this mimic sea, stood the Venice of the West, lifting her thousand temples and palaces out of the blue bosom of the waters, and along her streets ran canals, to whose brinks the solid pavements of stone were laid; stretching away from the city, through the lake, to the main land, ran three great causeways of stone, wide enough for ten horsemen abreast, with an occasional hiatus, over which bridges were thrown, which might be removed in case of invasion from an enemy. These causeways led, one two miles west, to Tlacopan; another, seven miles south, to Iztapalapan; which city stood on a peninsula separating lake Tezcuco from Chalco; the third great causeway led to the north, three miles, towards Tepejacac. In addition to these, there was another grand work of masonry, the royal aqueducts, which led the water into the city, across the lake from the southwest, towards the distant hill of Chapoltepec. On the opposite side of the lake, and fifteen miles to the east of the city of Mexico, stood its rival in beauty and magnificence, Tezcuco, the Athens of America, placed like a gem upon the crown and border of the lake, and containing, at that time, according to the historians, one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. It was reared upon the ruins of a city, the very names of whose builders are as uncertain and baseless as shadows. The houses were of a beautiful blood-red stone, light and porous in its character, usually two stories in height, with flat roofs, and around the upper walls ran a terrace from which they could command a view of the streets. Countless and elegant were the palaces which adorned this superb city, and near it, upon the hill of Tezcozincin, was the famous garden and pleasure palace of the Tezcucan kings.* The city of Mexico was laid off in perfectly parallel streets, and like Tezcuco, built in the most symmetrical order. Its dwellings were so arranged that in front they faced upon the

* "It was the city where the Mexican language was spoken in its greatest purity and perfection, where the best artists were found, and where poets, orators, and historians most abounded."—*Clavigero*.

public street, and in the rear upon the canal ; their architecture was exquisite in taste, and so common were these noble structures that there seemed one line of palaces in every direction. Towering high above all, in the centre of the city, surrounded by an immense wall, with sculptured serpents winding over the parapet, and occupying the space of forty four acres, stood the grand Temple, the Teocallis, or House of God, the vast theatre of the idolatrous worship of the Aztecs, with forty other inferior temples in the same enclosure, which space was paved with stones, and made as smooth as it could be polished ; to the wall, which was eight feet high, there were four gates facing the cardinal points of the compass ; the main temple was three hundred and twenty feet square, and one hundred and twenty feet high ; upon its square, flat top, rose a tower fifty six feet higher, the whole assuming a pyramidal form from a stairway, or flight of stairs, running round the outside of the temple, forming, as it were, five different stories. This was the Temple of Huitzilopochtli, or Mexitli, the Mars of Mexican worship, the scene of sacrifice, whose blood-drenched altar-stone smoked with a catalogue of victims, so fearful that credulity shrinks back amazed at the bare suggestion of their number. In the tower which stood upon the top of the temple was the sanctuary of the idol, who is thus curiously described by an ancient writer. "With a shield in his left hand, a spear in his right, and a crest of green feathers on his head, his left leg adorned with feathers, and his face and arms streaked with blue lines, and also a twisted pine in his hand. His stature was of gigantic size, in the posture of a man seated on a blue-colored bench, from the four corners of which issued four huge snakes. His forehead was blue, but his face was covered with a golden mask, while another of the same kind covered the back of his head. Upon his head he carried a beautiful crest shaped like the beak of a bird, upon his neck, a collar, consisting of ten figures of the human heart ; in his right hand a large, blue, twisted club, in his left, a shield, on which appeared balls of feathers disposed in the form of a cross, and from the upper part of the shield rose a golden stag, with four arrows. * * * His body was girt with a large golden snake, and adorned with various lesser figures of animals made of gold and precious stones, which ornaments and insignia had each their particular meaning. * * * They never deliberated upon making war without imploring the protection of this god with prayers and sacrifices, and offered up a greater number of victims to him than any of the other gods." Huitzilopochtli was the chief god of the Mexicans, Tezcucans, and even their constant enemy, the Tlascalans ; but in Cholula, Quetzalcoatl held the primary position ; with the Mexicans he was the god of the air, the divinity of halcyon days, who embarked after passing through Mexico, and sojourning in Cholula, in his wizard skiff for the fabled Tlapaltan. He had white skin, dark hair, a long beard, and a face of great gentleness and beauty. (Dr. Siguenza says that this was St. Thomas, the Apostle, which he is well convinced of by his preaching, his prophecies, the crosses which he erected, and his foretelling that a race with beards would come from the east and conquer Mexico.) In addition to these, there

were some three hundred other gods worshipped by the Aztecs, and added to this number, the sovereigns, the great lords, and also the nobility, had in their houses six *penates*, or minor images, and the common people two. These figures, which were of various forms, ornamented the public streets and grounds, and such was their number that when the capital fell into the hands of the Christians, no less than twenty thousand were destroyed. Such idolatry shocks the senses of the modern mind, and it shudders to think of those horrid sacrifices, wherein it is agreed upon by historians that many, many thousands perished annually. Yet why seems this belief so strange, when our own ancestry held once in awe and reverence the imaginary forms of Odin, Thor and other Norse gods, whose mysterious presences were observed in the rolling fogs and mists which encircled the Arctic pole, whose voices were heard in the rumbling thunders which broke over Orkney and the Hebrides, whose smiles were the roseate tints which danced in the Northern Lights, and whose anger was manifest in the shock of mountain icebergs, in their crashing conflict, when the wild hurtling storms howled over the Northern Seas?

In the eighteen months which composed the Mexican year, there were human beings sacrificed in each one, saving the eighteenth or last month, which commenced about the first, and concluded about the twentieth of February. There were various forms of sacrifice, and the offerings to the different deities varied in their character; the chief objects, however, were human beings, rabbits or leverets, and quails; and of these birds the multitudinous numbers offered exceed all belief. One of the most singular ceremonies was the sacrifice to the god Tezcatlipoca; "this victim was the handsomest and best-shaped youth of all the prisoners; they selected him a year before the festival, during the whole time he was dressed in a similar habit with the idol; he was permitted to go round the city, but accompanied by a strong guard, and was adored everywhere as the living image of supreme divinity. Twenty days before the festival, this youth married four beautiful girls, and on the five days preceding the festival, they gave him sumptuous entertainments, and allowed him all the pleasures of life; on the day of the festival they led him, with a numerous attendance, to the temple of Tezcatlipoca, but before they came they dismissed his wives. He accompanied the idol in the procession, and when the hour of sacrifice was come, they stretched him upon the altar, and the high priest with great reverence opened his breast and pulled out his heart. His body was not like the bodies of other victims, thrown down stairs, but carried in the arms of the priests and beheaded at the bottom of the temple; his head was strung up in the Tzompantli, among the rest of the skulls of the victims which were sacrificed to Tezcatlipoca, and his legs and arms were dressed and prepared for the tables of the lords; after the sacrifice, a grand dance of the collegiate youths and nobles who were present at the festival, took place. At sunset the virgins of the temple made an offering of baked bread and honey. * * The festival was concluded by dismissing from the seminaries all the youths and virgins who were arrived at an age fit for matrimony, the youths

who remained mocked the others with satirical and humorous raillery, and threw at them handfuls of rushes and other things, upbraiding them with leaving the service of God for the pleasures of matrimony; the priests always granted them indulgence in this kind of youthful vivacity."

Close to the great temple were the public schools, with distinct departments for male and female, noble and plebeian students, where a Spartan education was given to them physically, and their minds imbued with the precepts of their religion. At the end of every fifty-two years there was a grand festival of rekindling fire, which element they superstitiously believed would be lost to them without this ceremony. A procession was formed of many miles in length, which, headed by the priests, wound its way to a neighboring mountain, where after offering up a sacrifice, renewing the fire upon an altar, and immolating their victims, who were generally prisoners of war, the multitude returned to the city, and a general Bedlam-like Saturnalia took place, in which, breaking all their crockery-ware, and beating their wives, cut the most important figure.

The political division of the country was between the king, the church, the nobles, and the commons, a division in which an assimilation to European modes of distributing lands is plainly perceptible. The institution of slavery existed in a modified form, being confined to prisoners of war, malefactors, and those who failed to pay their taxes, the latter class might work out their redemption, and a man might sell his children or even sell himself, but slavery did not exist in a hereditary form.* "The Mexican government," says Don Antonio de Solis, "discovered a remarkable harmony between the parts which composed it. Beside the council of the revenue, which, as we have said, took care of the royal patrimony, they had a council of justice, which received appeals from inferior tribunals, a council of war, for the forming of armies and military provisions, and a council of state, which was generally held in the presence of the king, and treated matters of the greatest importance. They likewise had a sufficient number of judges of commerce, and other different officers, as provosts of the king's court, who went about the city to take up delinquents. These officers, as likewise did the alguazils, or lieutenants, carried a staff in their hands as a mark of distinction, that their office might be known. They held their tribunal in a certain part of the town, where they heard the parties and immediately determined the cause; their judgments were summary and verbal, both sides appeared with their claims and witnesses, and the cause was presently decided—except where it happened to be a case of appeal to a superior tribunal. They had no written laws, but were governed according to the institutions of their ancestors, custom, upon all occasions, supplying the want of laws, when the pleasure of the prince did not interpose to make innovations. All these councils were composed of men experienced both in war and peace, and the council of state, which was superior to all the others,

* "Slavery had already been introduced among the Mexicans, and the sons of those whom they had taken in war were reduced to a sort of servitude."—*Cardinal Lorenzana.*

was formed of the electors of the empire, which was a dignity conferred upon the ancient princes of the blood royal ; and when matters of great consequence were to be discussed, they summoned to the council the kings of Tezcuco and Tacuba, who were the principal electors and had this prerogative by succession. The four chief counselors always resided in the palace, and attended near the king's person to declare their opinions upon whatever offered, and to give his decrees the greater authority among the people. Rewards and punishments were dispensed with equal care ; murder, theft, adultery, or other disrespect toward the king or their religion, were capital crimes ; all other misdemeanors were easily pardoned, for their very religion itself disarmed justice by tolerating vice. Corruption in the ministers was also punished with loss of life, and no crime was looked upon as venial in those who served in public capacities. This custom Montezuma observed with the utmost rigor, having people of especial trust to examine into their conduct, and even to offer them bribes, and he who was found deficient in any part of his duty was infallibly punished with death."

In the matter of marriage, it was an invariable custom to refuse the hand of a bride to the first application of a suitor, a policy which, at this day, would be considered somewhat equivocal, if not altogether unsafe. The garments of the parties were tied together by the skirts, and the matrimonial knot was considered as inseparable as the Gordian. Upon such an occasion, and the almost necessarily consequential event of a birth, a free use of liquors of an intoxicating kind was permitted, but upon no other occasions, under the severest penalties, saving to nobility, and old men, who were allowed more license in this respect—the joyous rites concluded with a dance, an amusement very common among the Aztecs, and one in which they displayed an infinite degree of skill and grace. But the laws did not restrict the husband to a single wife at a time ; yet, though polygamy was permitted, it was not practised to any extent, except by the superior orders. The priesthood, which amounted to many thousands, were not confined to celibacy, a course rather more in keeping with a common-sense view of virtue, than the rigid austerity of a canonical bachelorhood. The military department of the government was one which received a great amount of attention, and no profession was more honorable than that of a soldier. The garment of the ordinary men was simply a cotton band around the waist, and this, of course, left the body exposed in battle, which was remedied in the higher classes or grades of soldiery by having quilted dresses of cotton, a simple armor, but by being proof against arrows, it avoided the weapon which was most likely to be used against them, their chief arms being bows and arrows, slings, darts, and other missiles ; but, in addition to these, spears were common, tipped with that extraordinary stone called *itzli*, or obsidian, which was a species of flint capable of receiving an edge as fine as a razor, and a polish in which the face could be seen distinctly as in a mirror. The *maquahuitl*, which was the most effective instrument of warfare in their employ, was formed by splitting a stout stick and fastening therein pieces of *itzli*, which pro-

truded on either side, with spaces of several inches between each blade—so severe was this weapon, that some over-imaginative historian records an instance of a horse's head being severed by a single blow of a maquahuitl. The nobility and distinguished warriors were clad in the most gorgeous surcoats of feather-work, a material in the composition of which the Mexicans were unapproachable; these, with spotted cotton garments, and beautiful skins of animals, were sometimes covered with thin breast-plates and other armor of copper, and even silver and gold. Their heads were defended by helmets of various construction, made either of very thick dried hides, or pieces of wood carved in curious shapes, such as the head of a boar or panther. The want of horses, gunpowder, and iron or steel, detracted very much from their military efficiency, and the use of those things by their enemies contributed, in a great measure, to the subjugation of the Aztecs. In short, although their condition does not fill the modern European idea of civilization, yet it was in some respects a rival of oriental luxury and magnificence, and so far superior, in every regard, to the condition of the North American Indians, that any comparison between them is wholly out of the question. And the idea of their having emigrated from Asia has more fancy than fact for its foundation; for this argument, having for its basis the similarity of monuments with Egypt, affords no stronger proof of a common origin of the races, than the resemblance of a rose and a dahlia does of their identical character or common parentage.

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CHAPTER I.

It was night, and the white moonlight fell upon the marble and alabaster pillars of the palace of Montezuma, and the ruddy gleam of torches could be seen through the latticed windows, flashing from the banquet room, where sat the monarch of the Aztec empire, amid a brilliant assemblage of the nobility, and chief persons of his realm. The emperor was clothed in light and graceful robes of azure and white ; sandals of gold were upon his feet, and a crown of the same metal, studded with starry gems, encircled his brow. He wore a collar of brilliants and precious stones, among which the emeralds, which were of enormous size and most highly prized, shone conspicuous. In age the emperor was about his fortieth year ; his stature was tall and graceful ; his complexion of a shade between an olive and cinnamon hue ; his hair was dark and long (it being the custom not to cut the hair, except as a disgrace or punishment). His eyes were also dark, with a soft, melancholy expression in their glance, which betokened an inertness of character ; but upon the slightest excitement they assumed a liveliness and intelligence of a very pleasing order.

Immediately upon the right of the monarch, sat his brother, Cuiclahua, prince of Itztapalapan (a city across the lake towards the south). In figure this person resembled Montezuma, but the countenance he bore betokened a firmness far above that of the other ; there was a fierce and fiery look in the flashing black eye, and a determination in the contraction of the brow, and compression of the lips, that showed Cuiclahua to be a stern and resolute man.

Upon the left of the emperor, sat Cacama, the young king of Tezcuco ; in his physical form he was admirably developed, and his raven ringlets rolled off from his fine forehead, and clustered upon his broad and manly neck ; there was a look of dignity and daring in his aspect, which won the admiration of the observer

in an instant ; his powerful voice rang clearly through the hall, and his bright teeth glittered between his parted lips, as he said :

“ By the bones of our forefathers, brother Cuicuitca, thou wouldst make us believe, next, that the Tlascalans will march against Tezcuco.”

The person to whom this was addressed was a sly, sinister-looking man, with a dark visage, and a roving eye ; he replied :

“ There may be more grounds for that opinion, in time, Cacama, than you think for at present. You may remember when our ancestors were scorned as an insignificant and contemptible race ; but time has taught our enemies to be careful how they taunt the true children of the gods.”

“ Fear not,” replied the other, “ that our foes will rise to so great a pitch in a short time ; armies cannot spring up like mushrooms, in a night, and though the Tlascalans be fierce in fight, they are too few in numbers to be feared.”

“ But I regret to hear,” said another brother, called Coanaco, “ that Ixtliloxchitl, who is a son of our father Nezahualpilli, has withdrawn himself from Tezcuco, and now heads a rebellion against you, Cacama, in the neighboring mountains.”

“ Then, let him come on,” replied Cacama ; “ if his discontented spirit can find no object to vent itself upon, save the quietness of the crown which has descended to me, from our father, in the same course which has been continued for centuries, I say, let him come ; not that I wish to wreak vengeance upon a brother for his rash acts, but I will make those rascal rebels know what it is to raise a revolt in a quiet kingdom.”

“ I hear,” said Montezuma, “ that these persons are collected in the mountain caves, and are committing robberies not only upon the rude Otomies, but even upon our peaceful peasantry ; if this be true, it shall not be well with them if they continue this course.”

“ But how,” remarked Cuicuitca, “ if they should join the Tlascalans ?”

“ I will bid them return to their allegiance. I will send a deputy to Ixtliloxchitl, in person,” said the emperor.

“ Suppose,” returned Cuicuitca, “ that he refuse to comply with the order ?”

"Then, by the bones of our sires!" interrupted Cacama, "let the penalty fall upon the heads of the Tlascalans; we have had their shadows in our sunlight too long already."

"Well, friends," said Montezuma, "who will pledge us in a song, and a cup of clear octli, the precious juice of the aloe? My own minstrels have, of late, found no lay to suit my mood; I would have a sad, sweet song, wherein the moonlight of pleasure fringes the clouds of sadness with a quiet glow of beauty. Ah! were I a minstrel myself, and could pour forth my soul in song, you should hear the silver waves of melody break around you, and their dying murmurs fade away in the echoes of these halls."

"By the spirit of melody and poesy! my lord," said Cacama, "but thou dost speak more than thy minstrels can sing."

"Nay, cousin," said the king, "but you flatter me."

"Indeed, my lord, I do not," was the reply; "every fine feeling soul at this board will join me in saying that thou art a poet, though thou makest no songs."

"Of course," answered the king, "they will echo your compliment; but, Cacama, thy father, was the very prince of poets, and thy mother had a voice like a mocking-bird, for melody; if you will call to mind a song of his, and sing it with her voice, you will revive the past, and make me a double debtor. Wilt thou be accompanied with the instruments?"

"Nay, my lord, if you will needs hear so rude a voice as mine, you will please hear it alone, as I am too poorly skilled in music to meet the time of their twanging, and I should but mar their melody, for my manner is without measure, except according to the impulse of my own feelings; but, without more ado, I will sing, as best I can, lest I should give too much importance to the song by a prelude of words."

So, with his clear and powerful voice, which made the hall ring, he sang:

SONG.

When hope's sunlight fadeth,
Memory's moon doth rise,
Silver light pervadeth
Ocean, earth, and skies.

Clouds, like dark-winged angels,
Sweep along the night,
'Till their sable pinions
Catch the golden light.

So when dreams of sadness,
Shadow o'er the soul,
Gleams a.e seen of gladness,
Like lights around the pole ;

And though darkness cover
All the deep blue skies,
Through night's veil the lover
Sees an angel's eyes.

When youths' dreams have faded,
Memory looketh back
Where the light is shaded
In life's sunny track ;
And within the bowers
Where our joys have strayed,
Memory marks the flowers
Leaf by leaflet fade.

When the day expires,
Darkness cometh fast ;
Crimson clouds, like fires,
Fly before the blast ;
Grey and purple glimmer
Where the sun lies dead,
And the shadows shimmer
Round his dying bed.

So, when life declineth,
Age creeps on with ills,
Gazing where light shineth
On youth's distant hills ;
But this night of sorrow
Breaks at length away ;
Joy cometh, and the morrow
Dawns with eternal day.

Loud and long were the manifestations of applause which were given and continued, when Cacama concluded his song, and they were echoed from the doors by a party which entered ; this con-

sisted of Montezuma's two daughters, and his sister, Papatzin, with an attendant train of female followers, and the emperor's nephew, Guatemozin. In company with these came a majestic figure, who walked the hall with a dignified and stately step. He threw his dark mantle gracefully over his shoulders, and advanced with the party opposite the emperor, where they all made the most respectful, nay, reverential obeisance, to the person of the monarch. Servants instantly appeared with elegantly wrought mats and cushions; and upon these the party reclined, in a similar manner to that position in which they found those already assembled.

The first that had entered was Tecuiclipa, who was a beautiful feminine likeness of her father, Montezuma, tall, graceful in her movement, with a bearing of pride and elegance worthy of the queenly state and classic face of the emperor's daughter.

The other was her sister, Tecalco, the flower of Aztec loveliness; through the pure transparency of her clear complexion, the rich flush of a warm, southern blood kindled and glowed into a soft crimson, like the delicate and downy velvet on the sunny side of a semitransparent peach; and her lips were like the bright-tinted blossoms which forerun the same fruit. Her eyes were of that liquid hazle which, by night, deepens into darkness, eyes, which in their quietness had a melting and fawn-like softness, but in moments of animation caught a brilliant lustre, and sparkled with a speaking beauty to the passing emotions of her mind. Her hair was lighter in its hue than any of the tribe, it being a soft brown, while black was the prevailing color; in its texture it was fine and glossy as a web of shining silk, and its light and luxuriant tresses were bound back from her brow by a band of beautiful pearls, which were in admirable keeping with the purity of her complexion. Her figure was the blending of a spiritual or fairy-like lightness, with the round fullness of womanly beauty; and her movements were all characterized by a natural ease, grace, and elegance. Her every air and attitude had in it something bewitchingly winning.

Directly opposite to her sat the monarch's sister, Papatzin; her face had been handsome, nay, commandingly fine, but habitual melancholy had worn traces of premature age in her cheek and

brow, and her fair face was as a fading flower, a blossom touched by an untimely blight, which no spring time or fostering hand can make resume its original loveliness ; a pensive gloom pervaded her features, and her very smile had in it something touchingly sad.

The figure that had advanced nearest the emperor was his nephew, Guatemozin, the pride of the Aztec chivalry, with a form and face fitted for the Apollo Belvidere, a countenance which, in a glance, revealed to the beholder a mouth whose delicate cut and meaning expression was an unmistakable index of character. His eyes were large and liquid, and their dark orbs were so shaded by their long lashes, that they seemed of an intense blackness ; his skin was unusually fair, and as the masses of raven ringlets rolled down upon his exquisitely formed neck, it displayed a feminine beauty, notwithstanding the powerful muscular development of his manly shoulders. His was a face and figure for a woman to look upon and love ; his was an eye and an arm for a friend to admire, and a foe to fear ; a face that you were ready to call friend from its frankness, and a hand that you could grasp at a glance, and feel assured that its chords led to a noble, chivalric, and high-spirited heart. His dress was gorgeous, consisting of a magnificent robe of feather-work and furs, which was gathered gracefully around him, and fell over his shoulders in easy and ample folds.

The other personage, who had entered at the same time, was a being to be once seen and he could never afterwards be forgotten. His height was above the medium standard of men, but from his great breadth of chest and shoulders, he did not appear tall ; the easy manner in which he handled his dark, flowing mantle, and the gravity of his carriage, lent him a look of majesty in movement that would have distinguished him in the midst of a multitude ; he wore a high, two-sided hat, like a bishop's mitre (in this he differed from all the company, who never used this article of headdress in any shape), which hat he doffed as he entered, and displayed a most extraordinary head. It was covered with a mass of jet-black hair, which lay in waves upon the top of his head, and clustered closely about his neck and temples. His forehead was towering and of massive breadth ;

his brows were very black, and beneath them his eyes flashed electric fire. There was a fearful and mysterious beauty in the solemn and severe depths of his eyes, yet they charmed and they awed at the same instant; their mystic brightness won your gaze, and their profound thoughtfulness had a severity which startled you. The outline of the features was large, but classically correct; and unlike any of the rest of the assemblage, his raven beard was remarkably long and heavy. His voice was deep, rich, and melodious, and the eye of the traveller would wander many a day over the inhabitants of earth, before it would alight upon a more striking or remarkable being than Malmiztic, the Toltec.

He was the living representative of that shadowy race whose works have outlasted memory and history! and the measureless character of his mind, together with his erudition in all abstruse learning or scientific mysteries, made his name famous throughout the empire, and wherever he went, so universal was the respect paid to him, that he was known as the Revered. With the emperor he was in high favor, as the most skillful calculator in the realm, in regard to the complex calendar of the Toltecs, which the Aztec race had adopted; and with the mathematicians of the schools, and the architects of the empire, his opinion was deemed invaluable. But the whole of the common people and many of the nobility had an instinctive dread of him, for they imagined there was no magic or sorcery in which he was not versed; and the very results which he had produced by chemical science in the emperor's smelting house, in assaying metals, and the formation of new material and rare compounds, were looked upon as conjurations obtained by communication with evil spirits. But the class which held him in the greatest horror, and looked upon him not only as the agent, but the evil spirit himself, was the priesthood; they feared him, and even avoided his sight, and in fact would have destroyed his life, had he not been known as a man deeply respected by the monarch; and, in addition, there was no one in the realm, not even the emperor himself, who was possessed of so vast an amount of gold and jewels as Malmiztic. His palace, near Tezcozinco, was a microcosm of strength, beauty, and magnificence. But it was not for this that the priests held

him in such abhorrence, but it was because the Toltec was the worshipper of an unknown and invisible God, and because he had denied and refused to worship Huitzilopochtli, or any of the accepted deities of the Aztecs, and had been heard to speak against them all, except Quetzalcoatl ; and it was rumored that he had in his possession a manuscript written upon aloe leaves, in Quetzalcoatl's own hand, which had descended to Malmiztic from his ancestry, who had dwelt in Tula and afterwards in Cholula ; but even to Quetzalcoatl's own image the stern Toltec had never been known to bow. Those who had watched him narrowly, had sometimes seen him, in the lone and silent hours of the night, in field or grove, upon bended knees on the green-sward, gazing fixedly up in the bright blue skies at the stars, or with clasped hands watching the midnight moon, as she went wading with her silver lamp through the black and broken masses of mountain clouds.

"Malmiztic," said Montezuma, "it is said that you sing ; shall we not hear a reply to Cacama's verses ?"

"If it please you, my lord," answered the other, "to hear my notes you shall have them cheerfully. I fear that I am more bold than touched with maiden modesty. I cannot grant your majesty's request in full, as to reply, but I can give his father's last song, if my memory has not grown treacherous with two score years' service."

"Why, as I live, Malmiztic," said the emperor, smiling, "it was but yesterday you dared to rate me for desponding, and that in good round terms ; and now, behold, to-day you are losing your voice, as you fear, and finding yourself suddenly growing old at two scores !"

"Were I a Tlascalan," said Guatemozin, "I would not hear it give the battle cry, nor see that Toltec arm wielding a blade of itzli before my eyes for fifty kingdoms rich as Aztlan. But give us the last song of Tezeuco's poet-king."

And Malmiztic sang :

SONG.

All the joys of the present let us cherish,
All that's bright and beauteous must decay ;
Pleasure's purple flowers droop and perish,
Leaf by leaf from beauty's blossoms, drop away.

Why stand amid the mountain snows repining,
While all the valley blushes with its bloom;
Why 'mid the roses of our life be twining,
The night-shade berries, fitted for the tomb.

The grave is but the gateway which discloses,
A realm where angels fill the atmosphere;
Where, as we dream upon a bed of roses,
A seraph comes to kiss away each tear.

Mark now the bow, life's bright but fleeting token,
Catch now the breeze, it stays not on the lawn;
Seize! seize! the harp, before its strings are broken,
The wine of joy, before its zest is gone.

As the last sound of these words died away, a very shout of applause arose, in which the emperor was most rapturous. "As I live," said he, "Malmiztic, thy voice thrills through me like magic; there is something in its deep, sweet tones softer than falling waters, and more wild and mellow than the horn of a hunter, which in the grey light of morning, sends its echoes down the mountain side, and through the silent valleys. Why, had I known thou wert so skilled in song, I should have had no musicians but of thy choosing. Thou hast pleased me well, what favor shall I grant thee in return?"

"If it please you, sire," returned Malmiztic, "the boon that I shall ask, is, that you will make Guatemozin sing the noble ladies a love song."

"Ay! good! good!" cried a number of voices at once, "let us have a song for the fair ladies."

"But I do not sing," said Guatemozin. The answer to this was a burst of laughter from Cacama. "What!" said he, "not sing? Our cousin Tecuiclipa hath just said that you have sung, night after night, under her window, and that it was more winning and rare than the voice of the mocking-bird in the fig-tree."

"Then, if you will have me sing," said Guatemozin, smiling, "I will give you a new song, and who, think you, is the author? why, there he stands, he that has grown old so suddenly, he, the grave astronomer, the cold-blooded, wine-hating philosopher; Ay! uncle, and ladies, you knew that he was the great painter, the

scholar and man of science, and later, that he is a musician ; and now, to conclude, behold him in his new character of poet !—and so, for his song.”

And, with these words, Guatemozin broke forth with a flood of melody, whose waves gliding on, rose, sparkling, to their pitch, and then swept smoothly away, reflecting a thousand images in each sweet swell.

SONG.

Quetzalcoatli's bark hath flown,
O'er the eastern ocean,
As he went, the mountain waves,
Lost their wild emotion.
The Halcyon brooded on the deep,
The Nautilus went sailing,
The snowy sea-bird fell to sleep,
And ceased her mournful wailing.

He cast the wine cup far away,
And held its draught forbidden,
For in its purple depths there lay,
A subtle serpent hidden.
He tore the chaplet from his head,
And scattered all its flowers,
Because, their fragrance lost, he said,
Recalled life's wasted hours.

But in his wizard skiff he stood,
And to his harp was singing,
While she went skimming o'er the flood,
Her sail no shadow flinging !
But, as an eagle sweeps the sky,
With moveless pinion feather,
That magic boat flew swiftly by,
The bark and he together.

Though far away, the coral caves,
His voice seemed to be haunting,
And on the wind, across the waves,
'T was borne in strains enchanting,
And as its murmurs died away,
Where sunlit billows quiver,
An echo's voice was heard to say,
“Dear woman's health forever !”

Quetzalcoatl wanders now,
In shadowy Tlapallan,
When he comes the knee shall bow,
Of each proud Tlascalan.
And when he again appears
From that unknown region,
"Dear woman's health" shall greet his ears,
From voices of a legion.

If that could be called a shout of applause which greeted the conclusion of Malmiztic's singing, those sounds which now followed Guatemozin's beautiful strain might well be termed a storm of approbation.

"By my crown!" said Montezuma, "my friends, I am indeed indebted to you for this—Guatemozin, for that strain you shall hereafter direct my musicians to arrange their themes by your skill and taste; and, for you, Malmiztic, I make you poet of the realm! see that you have your address ready by the first day of the next grand festival—I would sleep in this happy mood, for in the morning, mark you, friends, the grand regatta upon the lake takes place, and, as I have fixed upon a favorite, and shall expect to see you all at an early hour, I will even bid you good night, and to my rest."

So saying, the monarch rose, and all the party at the same instant, and bowing low they bade him farewell and wished him quiet repose; so supported by his nobles upon either hand, the emperor passed out of the great door into another apartment of the palace, and the company following, soon scattered themselves towards their various abodes, and the torches, which were now growing dim in the great hall, were extinguished; and in an hour not a sound was heard, saving the night breeze flapping the reeds of the latticed windows, through which the white moonbeams crept and threw their long lines of light upon the marble floors of that now silent and deserted banquet hall.

CHAPTER II.

THE REGATTA.

THERE were a thousand prows ploughing the blue bosom of Tezcuco in the bright glances of the morning; here shot by, one after another, the arrowy canoes, and there the more tardy craft toiled upon the waters. In one direction came the barges laden with matter for the market, and from Xochimilco came a fleet of fairy-like boats, filled with flowers, to be sold in the great city; they were of a thousand dyes, from the deep damask of the mountain rose, to the splendid stains of the beautifully painted tiger flower. Many of the boats were covered with boughs, in which were woven thousands of magnolia and acacia blossoms, forming beautiful bowers, beneath which some peasant boy or girl would be lying, while a brother or a father paddled the light craft on her easy way.

As the day advanced, boat after boat began to assemble in one immense fleet near the city; from this canal could be seen some nobleman issuing forth with his beautifully bedecked shallop; and there, some adventurous youth, ambitious to enter the race, would be driving his fragile bark towards the great centre, where those who were to contend for the prize were momentarily gathering. And now they came from every quarter; a squadron from the south towards Iztapalapan was seen; and now another came in view, making their westward way from Tezcuco, while from Tepejacac upon the north, and Tlacopan, as well as Chapoltepec, upon the south of the great city, numberless other vessels could be seen sheering the silver waters and hastening to the spot of attraction.

In a short time a superb gondola was seen cleaving its way along the lake shore; it had an awning of azure, studded with stars of silver and gold, and the portions of it which hung down

towards the water, like curtains, were embroidered with the most brilliant and beautiful feather work. The vessel was long and graceful in its shape, and around the bow, the sides, and the stern, were various figures, elaborately and exquisitely carved; but the flashing of the eagle, holding the serpent upon a cactus, wrought in gold, on a field of violet, which was seen displayed upon a banner waving high above the gorgeous vessel, left no doubt that this bark contained the royal presence. Twelve noblemen, with even-measured stroke, pulled at the oars, which, with their alternate blades of gold and silver, flashed in the sunlight with each returning sweep—for by this time the sun had risen above the bright spires of Tezcuco, and over the mountain wall which barred the valley from the east. Long feathery lines of light streamed down through the forest trees and scattered themselves in a shower of gold upon the glassy bosom of the lake, and high upon the dizzy pinnacles of these mountain heights could be seen thousands of half-clad peasants, collected to watch this all-exciting contest.

A general stir was now visible where the craft were most thickly crowded, and one by one the boats which were to enter the race came forth in a group by themselves, and the surrounding vessels scattered in all directions, and made their way as rapidly as possible across the lake towards the city of Tezcuco. A number of small boats next came up, and towed the contesting vessels in the same direction.

In the first boat, which was an elegantly ornamented wherry, painted white and azure, with an outspread eagle stretching from the bow, as if ready to cleave the air, sat Cuitlahua, prince of Iztapalapan; the boat which he was now in was the Emperor Montezuma's favorite clipper, and safely might the monarch trust his interest with his brother, for Cuitlahua, as he sat bare, save a brilliant girdle round the loins, displayed a form well fitted for the task.

The next in the line which were taking their way across to the starting point, was Cuicuitca's vessel; it was painted bright red, and bore a scarlet flamingo upon the bow, carved with great delicacy and skill.

The third contained Cacama; it was of a bright purple color,

studded with stars of silver, its material was birch-bark, and so light that he could have borne it upon his broad shoulders. The utmost care was required to preserve the equilibrium of the person who undertook to stand up in it, a thing necessary, as the boats were to be propelled by paddles, and not by rowing with oars.

The fourth competitor for the prize wore a soft white cotton mantle, like a cloak, wrapped round him, and fastened at the collar and waist by a band of blue; upon his head he wore a crest of long green and crimson feathers, which curled gracefully to one side, and looped in a sort of light bonnet, upon the other; over his face, hung a loose veil, which foiled the attempts of the multitude to penetrate the disguise. His boat was shaped like a pea-pod, or shell, long and arrowy, with an elevation both at the bow and stern, on each of which points an eagle in the act of dropping or falling could be seen. The bark was painted perfectly white, and not a spot or stain could be discerned upon any portion of it, without or within.

The fifth and last boat of the racers was a model of grace and symmetry in its construction; its sharp bow offered no resistance to the water, and it sat upon the lake like a swan; in hue it was as black and shining as a raven; but entirely around it, just above the line of the water, ran a bright and beautiful band of crimson and gold. In it sat a muscular man, in a mask and black domino, upon whom the eyes of the spectators at hand were as fruitlessly busy as upon the veiled occupant of the preceding bark.

The five boats were all arrived at a point in the lake where the emperor in his magnificent shallop, was already awaiting them. In a few moments the contending prows were turned toward Tenochtitlan; it was a beautiful sight, as they wheeled gracefully into line, to see the fine contrast in shape, color and adornment. The parties all stood with their blades poised, prepared, at the signal, to strike them into the yielding element. The emperor now rose from his cushioned couch, supported on either side, while before him an officer held a large drum, and, casting his eye along the prows, to see if they stood exactly even, he let fall his truncheon upon the head of the drum, and, at that instant, the blades struck the water with the exactness of a piece of machinery, and the boats sprang away like a herd of suddenly startled

deer, at which a shout arose from the lake which was answered by those upon the land, and re-echoed from the mountains.

Cuicuitca's barge led the way, and at every stroke she leaped from them, as a stag springs off from his pursuers, the rest kept side by side, and still Cuicuitca's bright flamingo flew from them, leaving a broken silver track in her wake. And now, Cacama's purple birchen bark, with its stars of silver, began to part from the rest, and shoot on after Cuicuitca; and now, the black boat, with its crimson and gold belt, fell far behind, and a laugh was heard from the many boats which followed, at the presumption of the black dressed mask to enter such a race, and with such competitors.

"Ay!" one would say, "a very pretty boat, and a fair oarsman, but this is no place for common-place work."

"Yes, yes," another would reply, "he will do very well for the fisherman's race, which comes off next week, but I can tell him he need not waste his strength where our stout king of Tezcuco plies a paddle, and the still stouter Cuicuitca."

"Yes, he'll do for the fisherman's race," laughed a dozen voices at once.

"But, neighbor of Tezcuco, let me tell you," said a voice, "that our emperor's brother will show you that Iztapalapan is the queen of this watery region—mark! now, how the lord Cuitlahua makes the royal eagle gain upon them!—see! how her white and azure body leaps along the lake; ay! ay! look at that! what think you of those strides? and where, do you suppose, we shall find these two poor, lame ducks which represent Mexico? for, see you, he in the white cloak has also fallen far astern. Ah! I lay my life it is some stout girl in love with the fellow in the mask."

"Ay!" said the Tezcucan, in return, it was a sensible move to hide their faces under masks, it might save them many blushes." "Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the crowd, as with a rush of oars, and paddles they pursued the flying racers.

By this Cacama had closed with Cuicuitca, and in a moment more passed slowly by, and took the lead, and a shout of applause was heard from the Tezcuicans as their champions swept ahead. And now the strength of Cuitlahua began to manifest itself, as he cleft the waters, and came up close with Cuicuitca, and, mov-

ing steadily by him, he ran side by side with Cacama; and at this powerful push, a loud huzza was heard from the boats of Iztapalapan, and the emperor and his suite waved their hands in token of admiration. As Cacama and Cuitlahua drove their paddles with even stroke, first upon one side of their boats and then upon the other, Cacama's birchen bark dipping so low with every sweep as to plunge her thin sides under water, Cuicuitca struck fast and hard to regain his lost ground; but it was of no avail, they led him still, and now he found those in the rear gaining slowly but surely upon him.

"Iztapalapan forever!" shouted the multitude, as their favorite pushed stoutly ahead, and led Cacama by the length of his boat.

The distance to be run was seven miles, five were already passed, when cries were heard, of "Well done, my White Lady!" "Bravely plied, my stout girl!"—and, with this, the snowy craft darted by Cuicuitca like a sea-gull, and, holding her way finely, stroke by stroke she neared Cacama, who, marking the gain, made sturdy but fruitless efforts to retain the second position, but, finding that although he made his light bark almost leap from the water, his exertions were unavailing, he dropped unwillingly astern.

Next came the cries of "Mexico! Mexico!" and the counter cries of "Iztapalapan forever!" as the sharp white shell shot swiftly up alongside of Cuitlahua. But it was no trifling task to pass the emperor's favorite, as she sprang forward with each well delivered stroke, the foam flashing over the bow, and showering itself upon the outstretched wings of the imperial eagle, but the dropping eagle of the white bark seemed to be gazing over its razor-like bow, and scarcely broke a bubble in its cutting course; away they sped, like arrows, and Cacama fell behind.

"By the blood of Tlaloc," shouted a young Mexican, "the White Lady leads!" "Huzza!" shouted the multitude, and scarcely had the shout gone up from the lake, when it was heard with ten-fold force from the shores. The white shell was now far ahead, she seemed to have risen like a frightened water-fowl, and flown away over the lake in advance of all her pursuers.

At this point, the boats were all at nearly the same relative position to each other, the white boat in advance, then the emper-

or's, next Cacama; following him came Cuicuitca, and immediately in his wake, the black barge brought up the rear, amid the many jests of the shouting multitude, who nearly caught up with him at different times—now a wag would offer to help him row, and another would say,

“Black domino! shall I tow you up among the racers?” “Nay, I have a leash of land turtles which shall haul him,” cried a fisherman, and a loud laugh mocked the black mask, as he quietly and easily held his course. Suddenly a loud burst of applause was heard from those who followed, with cries of “Bravely! bravely, my black sluggard!” “By the blood of Tlaloc!” shouted the young Mexican, “the old bear has awakened after his winter’s nap.”

And these cries were not without cause, for the black barge first swept by Cuicuitca as though he were standing still, and, darting onward, the domino flew past the birchen bark of Cacama, like a raven on the stormy blast; and still it held unchecked its rapid course, leaving a line of bubbles in its wake. At this moment it closed with the king’s craft, and the struggle was tremendous, on the part of the stout Cuitlahua, to hold his own; but vainly did he bend his sinewy back, and clasp his paddle with an iron grasp; the raven still went on, sweep after sweep it narrowed the space between the white keel and the gold and crimson belted bark of the black domino.

The last mile was now reached, and the shouts and voices were no longer heard, the thousands of anxious spectators upon the shores maintained a breathless silence, and, from the tops of the houses, the balconies, the wharves and the quays, countless eyes were watching with intense interest the progress of the two foremost boats as they neared the land, or spot where the flag, fluttering from a buoy, marked the goal of their exertions.

The white and black boats were now coming at a tremendous speed, having left their competitors far in the distance, the white one leading the race by a short space, which distance was perceptibly diminishing, through the immense power with which the muscular man in black was propelling his almost magical bark. The contest became more and more exciting every moment, the figure in the white robe now bent forward and dextrously swept

his dripping blade with a rapid and graceful stroke through the water, and, as the light breeze, formed partly by the bark's motion, struck his loose garment, its light folds fluttered in the air, and gave an ease to his appearance, although his efforts now were of the most trying character, the long feathers of his bonnet streamed back, and mingled with his dark locks, waving in the wind; the motions of his paddle were characterized, chiefly, by an even regularity and graceful sweep, rather than by any extraordinary display of power, or rapidity of motion. The other, in the domino, exhibited more strength, with less grace; his endurance seemed superhuman; and, as the two boats went on, each frail bark shivered as they were forced along at this terrific rate; their thin ribs bent almost to breaking, as the oarsmen leaned first upon this side, and again upon the other.

The raven was now wing and wing with the carrier dove, and neither boat gained any longer an inch upon the other; it was the pitch of their speed, neither power nor skill could add momentum to their impetus; they almost buried themselves in the water by their velocity. Long, bright skeins of sparkling foam shot off from their bows, and a thousand bubbles rose upon the surface of the lake in their wake—as they swept their paddles from bow to stern, the water whirled and gurgled in the eddy of the oar. Every nerve of the rowers now seemed strained to its highest tension, and every eye on shore grew bright with silent but thrilling excitement. As they neared the mark of their destination, the pulse of the great crowd seemed to cease beating, the hum of voices was hushed, and one intense feeling of overpowering anxiety produced a silence as unbroken as that of a desolate desert. On they came, dashing the crystal rain from their sharp bows, and rolling off the white foam like the tossing mane of a flying steed; and, as they plied the paddles, they darted onward with a lightning speed; every timber shook, and every tendon was stretched—the strife was terrible, more and more fierce grew the contest, but not an inch was gained or lost, they sprang forward at the same moment, and, to a hair's breadth their bows were even at every stroke. The goal was now hard by, the task was almost over, and the black mask appeared to have concentrated all the immense power of his extraordinary

physical frame for one last, desperate effort—it was the effort of an expiring giant, and, at this Titan-like convulsion, the black boat leaped half her length ahead, as by a spasm, and one more blow, of like character, brought her stern upon an even line with the bow of her snowy opponent: the black giant now gathered himself for his third Herculean labor, and striking the blade of his quivering oar in the blue water, he threw the full force and weight of his whole strength upon it, when the trembling paddle snapped like a broken reed, and the white boat shot out ahead, beyond the black raven, and passed the buoy like a sea-gull! whereat, the excited host sent up a shout that shook the mountains for miles around, and made the whole bosom of the lake tremble as if a thunder-bolt had burst upon the head of a neighboring peak—peal after peal of shouts came from the top of that mountain wall which girded about the valley of the lakes; and, as the wild sounds flew over the waters, the echoes caught them up, screaming, and bore them away, captives to the far off glens of the dark mountains.

When the emperor had arrived where the parties had landed, he commanded his steward to bring forward the beautiful jewels, and presenting them to the veiled victor, demanded his name; the last named person, loosening the blue band about his neck, and untying his veil, doffed his bonnet, and displayed the handsome head and dark, flowing locks of Guatemozin, the emperor's nephew, at which the crowd sent up loud cheers: Guatemozin bowed and received the casket containing the jewels, and, after returning his thanks for them, he turned and said to the black domino who was resting himself on a block of marble close at hand,

“Sir Mask, I know you not, but whoever you are, to you is due this prize, and I insist that you take it, for it is mine only by accident, but it is yours by desert.”

“Give me your hand,” answered the mask, “I only ask the true grasp of fellowship in its noble touch, and I am rewarded for my labor, for, by the stars! a stouter gentleman than thyself it has never been my fortune to cope with!”

“Yes,” said the emperor, “give him thy hand, and I will give him another casket myself. But, Sir Mask, since the sports

are concluded, you cannot refuse to give me your name, that I may make it honorable."

"You have it, sire," said Malmiztic, stripping off his mask and domino, and developing his massive, magnificent head. The mob shrank back instinctively, with evident signs of dread from his mysterious presence and its influence.

"Come hither, my good friend Malmiztic," said the emperor, "I can give you no jewels so beautiful as you have in your cabinet; but you will accept this casket from me as your friend; but for my promise of making your name honorable, in honors my treasury or power has nothing in its gift which could add lustre to the name of Malmiztic."

The Toltec bowed his majestic head, clustering with its raven locks, before Montezuma, and received from his hands a box of beautiful wood and workmanship, curiously shaped and inlaid with pearls and precious stones. The emperor then entered his palanquin and was borne upon the shoulders of his nobles to the royal palace; and the populace, bending low as he passed, dispersed themselves in various directions.

CHAPTER III.

It was a night of rejoicing in the great city of Mexico ; from numbers of palace windows countless lights were gleaming, and along the smooth stone pavements crowds of gaily-dressed citizens were strolling about in the soft night air of the south. It had been a day of feasting and gaiety, and the multitude had now come forth to listen to the many musicians who were assembled in the great park of this rich capital, which park was a square, surrounded by buildings, which would vie with oriental palaces for symmetry of architecture and elegance of appearance. The square was thickly studded with all the beautiful trees indigenous to the tropics, and was a wilderness of beauty in the heart of the city. Paths and roads wound through its shade in intricate serpentine rounds, and thousands of vines and creeping plants entwined themselves around the forest trees, and formed bowers, beneath whose shadows thousands were sitting in various parts of these extensive grounds, talking, singing, or making the night musical by accompanying their voices with instruments which breathed forth soft and bewitching melodies ; while overhead in the branches of the trees, hidden by the polished leaves, innumerable mocking-birds swelled their throats to imitate the strains, and warbled forth an ever-varying minstrelsy of their own. Interspersed through the gardens were fountains of fanciful device, ornamented by grotesque figures and carvings, over whose sides cool waters fell with a thousand liquid sparkles into broad basins of stone below ; and upon these pools the moonlight rested, and the shadows from the waving trees played over their surfaces of silver, and many were the bunches of bright and crimson berries that bent sportively from the breath of the night-breeze to dip at their shadows in the liquid mirror. And many a maiden and lover sat in the clustering thickets where the dense

foliage secured them from the eyes of the passing multitude, and where the fragrance of flowers formed an atmosphere fitted to be breathed by those whose words are warm with devotion, and whose hearts beat with the sympathetic concord of love. The gardens were the common property of all, and in the groves could be seen persons of all ranks, from the poorest peasant, dressed in the coarsest nequen, the white cloth made from the thread of the aloe, to the highest nobleman, in the finest stuffs, embroidered with feather-work, the unique but beautiful costume of the great. All took an interest in the grounds; each felt that he had part and parcel in them, and that too much care could not be bestowed in preserving the ornaments, trees, flowers, and fountains by which they were decorated and embellished. The disposition to destroy, in those who have access to restricted spots, was here unknown, and the lowliest hand that brought a flower from the forest was here furnished a bed where he might plant it, to bloom as the delight of a thousand eyes. Countless dahlias bowed their purple and gold heads to hedges of ruby lipped roses. The scarlet cactus, and her many thorny sisters, stood as the guardians to protect the more delicate plants from the intruding step of the stranger; and the fragrant daughter of the moon, the night-blooming ceres, opened her cup of incense in the darkness. Merry groups, in various parts of the garden or park, in places prepared for them, were dancing gaily to the pleasing pipings of reed flutes and the mellow and sonorous sound of horns and atabals; and many were the sports and pastimes which were progressing in various parts of the place. One party would be gathering flowers for the fête of the morrow; and another would be watching the gold and silver fish glide through the crystal floods of the fountains. And thus they rambled on for the evening hours through this Eden-like scene, until the quiet stars would admonish them to retire.

In a quiet, leafy, embowered nook, near the emperor's palace, in this garden, sat Tecalco, Montezuma's beautiful daughter, and by her side, carelessly lying in his dark mantle upon the mossy and velvet-like sod, was the mysterious Toltec; his dark eyes were turned upward towards her face, as he said:

"Tecalco, we have known each other long, and yet you say

there is something about me which you cannot comprehend, some strange riddle yet unexplained. It is true, young friend, there are depths in my heart which are still unfathomed, and I would not have the rude world busy making their soundings therein. I do walk behind a mask, as you say, a veil, through which the peering crowd can never penetrate ; but, Tecalco, I would have *you* know this seeming mystery ; it has no magic for its foundation, as the foolish world think, or as the base priests would have them believe ; mine is the philosophy which strips the disguises from nature, and opens fields of beauty and knowledge upon the sterile desert. Ignorance stands blinded in the dark doorway of nature's vast temple, while the course of investigation is ever onward, and before it the barred doors fly open, and a thousand new lights burst upon the delighted vision ; we must not halt ; this glance is not enough ; it is but the taste which gives the appetite for the feast. Would you see more, Tecalco ?”

“I would, Malmiztic. You, who have known me so long, must know that my feelings for you have, year by year, as my life's blossom grew, unfolded themselves, leaf after leaf, to the sun-like brightness of thy wisdom ; and, now, I blushing bare my bosom to tell you that I have drank at the fountain of those eyes until my soul can quench its thirst at no other spring.”

As Tecalco spake these words, the broad bosom of Malmiztic heaved heavily, and a sad, sweet smile stole over his countenance, as he replied :

“Young maiden, you have touched a tender point in a heart which has been growing cold for years, and warmed it into life ; but have you not some distrust of me, some secret dread that I am linked with something which is not suited to man's weal, or heaven's holier purposes ?”

“No, Malmiztic,” she answered, “you do me wrong to suppose that I have ever held thee other than thou art, or seemest to me. It may be that you have some evil agencies, but this heart shall never believe it ; never shall a thought of mine harbor distrust, until I find you false. I have had dread of you, but not distrust ; I have but looked upon you as I look upon the stars, with awe and admiration ; the glowing emblems which speak of something beyond their mere seeming. I have felt the strange

power of your presence, but it has been with a sense of love, not fear. I would have discovered the fountain of your feelings, but a strange spirit guarded its mysterious spring, and when I would gaze into its well of waters, I found that spirit fixing its magic look upon me, and I became spellbound with reverential awe ; and as I have grown up from girlhood, a love for thee has grown within me, and I have yearned to ask thee whence comes thy magical power and mysterious, sacred influence ?”

“Tecalco,” said Malmiztic, and his broad face grew bright with a smile, “I have lived alone in a weary world for years ; my story remains untold ; wherever I have wandered, man has feared me, and woman shrank away, and from your lips I have now heard, for the first time, the confession of one who loves me for myself alone, one who knows me not, but relying upon the faith of affection dares to trust her heart’s happiness with another. Ah ! Tecalco, I have spent years of loneliness without a face to light its solitude with one beam of love’s celestial radiance. Men have stood frozen with fear, like statues, in my walk of life ; others have bowed with reverence as I have swept the sceptre of science over their heads, and by its magic touch, as with an enchanter’s wand, I have called new elements into life, and given things inanimate the power of strength and being. The learned have listened to my discourses with delight, and held my opinions in high estimation, but they have looked upon me as a mystic idol, whose voice was oracular, but whose heart was stone, and beat not with the pulsations of human hopes and sympathies. Priests have pursued me, like jackals, yelping and howling at my heels ; and if I took a stand and turned upon them, they fled as though a host of sheeted spectres had risen from the firm earth full before them ; they pursued me in packs, and if I crossed one alone, he slunk cowering into his cell, as a bat or an owl shunning the daylight. Kings and princes have feasted me in their palaces, and offered me the first places at their banquets, but no seat in their hearts have I occupied. The peasant has given me a cup of water at his cottage door, but trembled if I placed my foot across his threshold. The hand of beauty has been given to me in the dance, but if I dared to ask a feeling of sympathetic affection, even by a look, the eyes of

beauty would close like the contracting leaves of a sensitive plant, and the fair hand shrink shudderingly away. And, now, why is this, you would ask? Shall I tell you, Tecalco?"

"Ay, Malmiztic," she replied, "for thou canst not say that I shrank from thee like that trembling plant, but rather, like the sunflower, followed thy course with my eyes, and lived only in the light of thy smile."

"If so, fair flower, mark me! and for those looks of kindness which thou hast given me, when the world has turned upon me its freezing face, I will tell thee a thing which shall repay thy love for the lone wanderer in the world's wide waste. I will tell thee my philosophy; ay! mark me, my child, I say my philosophy, a gem to which thy father's richest crown is as poor as the meanest mushroom that springs up in the darkness and dies in a day. If you can believe, follow me into the awful arcanum, enter the great temple of nature, and leave behind you the foolish phantasms and fictions which dance their delusive mazes before the minds of your Aztec priesthood."

The Toltec now drew from his bosom a dark book clasped with bands of gold, and studded with hundreds of diamonds of intense brilliancy.

"Here, Tecalco," said he, "lies more wealth than the mines of Mexico contain, not outwardly, for these gems upon the surface are but figurative of the exterior glitter which attracts the eyes of mankind; but look beneath the surface of things, and there, in the dark depths where the vulgar gaze reaches not, lie jewels whose lustre is imperishable, and whose value is beyond computation. In this volume is a secret whose worth is as far above thy father's treasury, as the snow-shrouded peak of Orizaba is above the ant-hill upon the plain at its foot. Would you know its history? then mark! and be silent hereafter, for *you*, the first one that has loved me, must hear it—start not—but listen."

Malmiztic seized Tecalco by the wrist, and his eyes flashed as they glanced from the book to her, while he spake on:

"This book was Quetzalcoatl's!"

"Nay, Malmiztic," said Tecalco, "you do but sport with my credulity."

"Nay, by the stars!" said the Toltec, "it is true; this hath been the heirloom of mine ancestry, the Toltec kings, who dwelt in Cholula and Tula; it hath passed from hand to hand, from king to king; yea! from century to century, since it was given to our Toltec forefather by Quetzalcoatl, who sat upon a rock by the sea-shore, explaining its mysteries from the first hour of the moon's rising, until the red rays of the morning sun shot their arrowy lines high into the blue vault of heaven. 'Farewell,' said Quetzalcoatl, 'I go to other spheres, and to stranger lands;' and, as he spake, his beautiful countenance lighted up with loveliness, until he became so fair and exquisite that the very sight of him was enchanting, while around him shone a soft, sweet light, milder and more delicate than the lamp of the glow-worm, which glimmers from the twilight copse. 'Farewell,' said he, 'good king; I have sojourned a time in your lands, and I have not found your doors closed to the stranger, nor your ears deaf to the voice of counsel; practise the precepts which I have taught thy people; suffer no sacrifices, save the offering of flowers, and preserve peace in every household. What this book, which I now give you, contains, will make you more wise and happy, if you follow it, than you have ever been before; and when you go down in the dark tomb of your fathers, one of the angel forms of which this book speaks will come to you in death's dismal chambers, and bear you to a land where life and joy become immortal.' So saying, Quetzalcoatl stepped into his wizard skiff, and bore away for Tlapallan. In the grey light of the morning his form faded and dwindled in the distance; and upon the shore the olden Toltec king reared a pyramid, and had graven upon its base the form of the book and a small cross, which were the last tokens which he had received from Quetzalcoatl. Tecalco, that book is in my hand! with this key, earth is no mystery; this, like the sun, will scatter doubt and darkness; for this, the poorest pauper might scorn the monarch's crown; it is meat to the hungry, and water to him who thirsteth, ay! a living water, whose taste makes this poor material frame of man a thing coeval with eternity."

"I pray you, then, Malmiztic," said Tecalco, "let me see the book, that I may learn what it contains."

"Would you learn that?" asked the other, "think well before you speak, because you must prepare to make a wreck of your present temples of faith, and on their sites erect one glorious shaft whose spire shall point to heaven eternally. Pause, then, maiden, ere you say that you are prepared to hear its sacred secret."

"I need not pause," she answered, "if your own deep mind has probed its depths, and proved its purity and truth, I will follow, though it uproot the deepest-seated principle of my faith."

"Then hear its first principle, and wonder," said Malmiztic; "there is but *one* God!" Tecalco started and shuddered. "Yea, marvel deeply," said the Toltec, "for it is a thought to dwell upon, yea, dream upon."

"But *one* God, say you?" questioned Tecalco.

"One God, and one only—an invisible and omnipotent Spirit," said Malmiztic.

"That is Huitzilopochtli," rejoined the emperor's daughter."

"No," replied the Toltec, "Huitzilopochtli is a dead and senseless stone, and all thy Aztec gods are but the forms and shadows of fictitious traditions, unreal mockeries of the mysterious Being whose words are in this volume, and whose finger points the lightning where to drop its liquid lance, the faintest echo of whose footfall is the rattling crash of thunder as it bursts from the black storm-cloud—One, whose unseen hand lifts the fallen flower, or with a hurricane sweep fells at one fierce blow a thousand mountain oaks, though they have been rooted, yea, riveted in the rocks for ages. Tecalco, gaze upon this book with reverence! its characters have been traced by a divine pen, and its words are hallowed beyond all human measurement; then answer me, fair girl, if I shall show thee from its written leaves, the road which leads to heaven's happiness; art thou willing to follow its directions, leaving thy dead gods and stolid blocks of stone, to walk in the light of His holiness whose glory is greater than mortal mind can compass?"

"Malmiztic," said she, "would you have me renounce the faith of my forefathers?"

"Ay," he answered, "look not upon the things which the eye sees, for these are evanescent, and but the ephemera of life's day of sunshine; but look to those things which the mind beholds,

and whose duration knows not the limit of earthly existence, each thought which leaps the dark gulf of death, and holds in its career in a land beyond the limit of the grave ! Ah ! Tecalco, could I picture that country where the faithful followers of this book shall dwell, the glowing tales which thy priesthood tell of the sun's bright mansions, compared with that, would be the picture of a dark lazar-house ; of black caves, which sigh perpetually with sounds of woe. Yes ! this mystic volume tells how the lone hours of life may be made joyous, and death but a bridging arch, spanning the vast void and gulf between this earth and the outer world to come ! Say, then, will you pluck up your former faith and burn its black weeds as a sacrifice upon the altar of your heart, as a token of a new faith and a better belief ?”

“Malmiztic,” said she, “I will follow thee ; but as I let go my hold upon the gods which were the hope and trust of my fathers, my footsteps falter, and my heart trembles.”

“Nay, then,” said the Toltec, “be firm, and fear not ; around the God whom you now acknowledge, a countless host of angels stand forever, and if thy heart grow weak, look but to Him, and He will send thee a spirit whose snowy arm shall clasp thy form and bear thee safely up. Yea ! night and day shall this angel walk with thee in thy wanderings, and watch over thy slumbers. Tecalco, canst thou believe ? and wilt thou love this God, and follow his one commandment, to love thy fellow mortal ?”

“I can, and will, Malmiztic,” said the maid, “and from this hour thy single God shall alone have his throne in my heart. My mind shall be his temple, wherein I will worship him in spirit and truth.”

“A thousand thanks to His mysterious power who hath made thee speak these words !” exclaimed the other. “Press now thy lips to this His holy book, and we stand pledged to the same faith forever !”

The parties knelt upon the moss-clad earth, and both holding the book, fixed their eyes upon the silent stars, which looked down upon them as they breathed a silent prayer to Him, whose form was hidden in the blue vault above, but whose eye poured down its stream of light into their souls.

At this moment footsteps were heard, and Guatemozin, with his arm around the fair form of Tecuiclipa, passed onward, breathing words of love's pure, warm language into her willing ear, and without discovering Malmiztic or Tecalco in their thick shadowed bower, entered by a private gateway into the emperor's palace court-yard.

The morning sun rises upon that beautiful garden ground, touching the purple pine-apples with a brighter hue; rich bananas are hanging upon the trees; a thousand flowery eyes have opened upon the day, and feeding upon the ripe figs are a myriad of many-colored birds, flaming macaws, parrots, green and gold, warblers dressed in rainbow dyes, humming-birds, with their emerald, scarlet, and gold glittering bodies, ruffled necks and purple throats, shooting through the sunshine and the shadow like so many flying flowers; and butterflies, whose broad wings of silver pranked with azure spots, or flecks of crimson, touch with velvet feet upon the downy flower, and seem but a living part of the blossom's beauties.

But the quiet nook in the garden by the palace was lone and deserted, for the proud, mysterious Toltec, and his lovely proselyte, the emperor's daughter, had long since gone from thence.

CHAPTER IV.

"WE also understood that he [Montezuma] was much influenced by an ancient prophecy, which is said to have declared that men would come from where the sun rises, to rule that country."—BERNAL DIAZ, del Castillo.

MONTENZUMA sat by night at his festal board ; all day long, dark, melancholy clouds had shaded his brow ; all his soothsayers had been called to interpret the wondrous trance into which his sister Papatzin had fallen ; she had suddenly, to all appearance, died ; but in the midst of the funeral services, she had risen up in her shroud, and declared that she had seen a dark bank of clouds rising in the east, and she fled from its coming wrath, and it had spread from the farthest line of the south to the polar-star ; gradually it climbed the skies until it neared the zenith ; with every moment of time the storm-cloud deepened in its darkness. At the farthest eastern verge, where it joined the horizon, the sheeted lightning lit up the black waters of a troubled deep, and its awful glare came momentarily nearer, lifting up sheets of fire between the ebon masses of the rolling clouds. The darkness grew deeper, as the storm gathered its vast billows along the sky, where rack upon rack, and bank behind bank, loomed up against the high arch of heaven, and caught a wild but magnificent glow as the red lightnings played and danced over the peaks which pierced the region of the stars. It seemed as hills and mountains were riding on the tempest, and sweeping through the sky with the storm blast hurrying them onward. Over the black mountain clouds, the yet unhidden moon poured down her flood of silver light, and whitened the deep valleys which lay between these dark hills, whose crowns shot far into the blue heavens. Suddenly the stars shot from their spheres, and rushing into glittering masses formed a new sun ! which, shedding a bright glory for an instant, burst and fell to the earth in a thousand brilliant

sparkles of fire. The moon tottered in her seat, and rose like a dying man from his couch, and staggering through the sky, fell headlong down the walls of heaven, and disappeared in the deep waste of the ocean waters. Now from the earth tongues of fire rose against the black bank of clouds; lightnings, like the serpent's fork, shook their trembling branches overhead, and thunder came rolling on, louder and heavier, until it burst with one tremendous shock in mid air. The wings of the wind were opened, and with one blast the forest was a naked field; stick nor stake was left standing, and clinging close to the ribs of the rocks, she saw her brother's palace and the beautiful city; and, behold! the giant spectre of the earthquake rose, and struck with his massive mace the gorgeous palace, and it crumbled into dry dust. He waved his sceptre over the city, and tower and cottage sank and disappeared in one huge mass. The earth gaped wide, and in the yawning void the whole went down, and from the huge black gulf black waters came bubbling and boiling up; and as they filled the space, they formed one dull, dead lake, whose surface was as lead, but beneath it was a waving world of fire, where thousands in the midst of flame were struggling to get breath, and yet they did not die. Smoke rolled along the fiery waves where the tortured mass was writhing, and its denseness choked them as they gasped for a draught of air. And there were two who rose from that seething furnace, unscathed and unterrified; they came up through the lake, and lo! they wore wings! The one was Tecalco, and the other the Toltec, and they sprang away from earth, arching their wings for heaven. The black veil of night was drawn aside, and the clouds rolled off before them, and their upward course through the skies lay through a clear space, which their forms traversed as swift as shooting stars, until they entered a realm where millions upon millions of beautiful beings were enjoying Elysian raptures. The two figures alighted, and were lost to sight in the midst of the crowd.

Such was the vision of Papatzin. And now that the dead was restored to life, the emperor had this gorgeous banquet prepared, at which were assembled a thousand of the first lords and ladies of the empire. A thousand different dishes graced the board:

the country had been scoured, far and wide, for fruits, animals and birds; even fish had been brought from the Gulf of Mexico to the capital, by runners, stationed at short distances apart, in the space of a few hours. All dainties and delicacies which could be devised by the most assiduous stewards or caterers were provided. The lake and the land were ransacked, and taxed to contribute something more than they had ever furnished previously. The service was pure gold, and this, as well as an incredible amount of garments of the finest feather work and embroidery, was to be distributed to the guests, after the feast, by the munificent monarch. The nobility were in their costliest costumes, and aromatic torches, as they burned along the walls of the great hall, reflected their rays upon a host of dark-eyed beauties, magnificently dressed, and glittering with the sheen of pearls and precious stones. Long ranges of vases adorned the room, in some of which delicious incenses were burning, and others held living flowers, breathing forth a countless variety of the most delicate and exquisite perfumes, and every gale which came in softly at the windows, from the thick wooded garden, hard by, was heavy with the spicy fragrance of odorous plants, and blossom-bearing trees. The meats, the fruits and confections passed away, one after another in their succession; and, now, the crystal goblets from Cholula were arrayed before each guest, and the menials filled them with the bright octli, the wine of the aloe, made purple by the dye of the cochineal—and with its exhilarating influence, the party grew more and more gay, until mirth and revelry, song, jest and sentiment lent their light to the glad faces of those who sat at that banquet-board. Joy was in all countenances save those of the emperor, Papatzin and Malmiztic, who sat near together, conversing one with the other, in a low tone, while the roar of revelry was constantly increasing around.

“Malmiztic, a health from you,” said the emperor, “to our sister.”

“With gladness, my liege,” said the broad browed Toltec, drawing from a golden ewer, a goblet full of pure, sparkling water, and raising it above his head, in his right hand.

“Hold!” said the emperor, “you do not mean to drink our sister’s health in that weak, unsavory draught?”

"Ay, my good king," said Malmiztic, "this is my only beverage; it is a drink fitted, by its purity, to pledge thy sister with—know you not its character? this is no maddening potion, tortured from the rank weeds or plants of the dull ground; it is an unstained fluid, distilled in the clouds of heaven, cooled as it is carried over the mountain snows, and rectified as it comes sparkling and laughing out of the unpolluted and unchanging rock—it is the everlasting emblem of truth, for it deceives you not with a feverish delight, only to sink the spirit in a double darkness, as that bright octli does; but it cools and refreshes the parched lip of thirst, and leaves no poison blister to follow its reviving and delicious draught. In that cup, my lord, which you hold, there is something more deadly than the mere poison worm, that feeds upon the organic frame and animal principle of life; there is a demon dwelling in its depths, who, when he enters the temple of the mind, will hold such orgies with his fiendish legions there, that thy soul will quake with horror, and strive in vain to shut out these terrors from its trembling and appalled vision."

"Nay, nay, Malmiztic," said Montezuma, "you are too wild in your imaginings, and magnify the evil, while you underrate the wine-cup's joyousness."

"My lord," replied the other, "if I could draw, with the utmost stretch of my fancy's power, one tithe of its unheard of terror, it would be such a picture that thy realm would turn pale at a single glance of it, and the boldest eyes close to shut it out forever."

"Well, then, have thy will, thou fearful water-drinker," said the monarch, "but, for myself, such strange forebodings cross my mind continually, and such dread shadows walk in the very sunlight of my thought, that I cannot escape from them, save by this generous draught, whose kindly influence restores my wonted cheerfulness."

With this the monarch raised his goblet, and a thousand crystal cups rose in an instant, in answer.

"Malmiztic," said the emperor, in a low tone, after draining his golden flagon to the dregs, "you know the long talked of prophecy is yet unfulfilled; for years we have heard that a race shall come from the east, by whose hands Tenochtitlan must fall

and her children be made captives ; portent after portent have we seen of late which tells of some direful change, and yet my diviners cannot read upon the horoscope when this evil shall fall upon our nation—yet, I can see it coming in the dim distance, something whispers me in the dead hours of night, that there is a hidden thunderbolt in the cloudless sky of my reign, which, dropping in the noon day, shall shiver my empire. Now, you have skill, unravel for me the meaning of my sister's trance, for by that, it seems, that you and my child Tecalco are to be saved from the general wreck, which destiny has fixed as my kingdom's fate."

"Sire," said the Toltec, "I cannot answer this now ; in time you shall learn its import."

"Then tell me," said Montezuma, "for you are said to know much of plants and medicines, what goodly herb dost thou know that will purify my blood, and make the melancholy moods of my mind take a brighter and more hopeful hue."

"That, my sovereign," said Malmiztic, "lies not in drug or plant to cure, but in the due control of over-sated appetite ; banish the thousand dishes which deck thy table, and let some simple food suffice, nature demands no more, until artifice, usurping her wholesome government, gives the body those unnatural cravings, whose excess, overtaking the powers of life, runs the mere machinery of man's mind and frame so fast, that prematurely it is worn out."

"What !" cried the emperor, "is this your skill in pharmacy ? to make a monarch drink water like a wild fowl, and live like a hermit upon a crust ! why this were to make existence a burthen, and life one perpetual day of penance.—But what voice is that ?" added he, starting.

"I heard none, my lord," answered Malmiztic, "saving the confused hum of the revelers."

"Heard you not," questioned the emperor, "a voice, as if of one calling from afar, a loud but mournful sound ?"

"Not a murmur, my sovereign," replied Malmiztic, "in which direction did the voice appear to come ?"

"As from the gardens, through the window," answered Montezuma, "but no matter, give me a cup of the bright octli ; fill it

to the brim, for I must scatter my gloomy forebodings, and forget that the voice of prophecy has ever presaged my kingdom's downfall, by an unknown stranger race. Though it be not my custom to drink deeply, yet shall the feast to night grow crimson from the blushes of the wine, until the rosy streaks of morning light up the east, and dispel the clouds which hang alike upon the sky and my mind—then, here is to the god of wine! Malmiztic, drink, if thou likest, to Tlaloc, the god of the water!"

The monarch held the glittering, massive cup of gold aloft, when, suddenly, a strange, unnatural shriek or scream was heard, and a huge owl darted in at an open window, and, flapping heavily on, blinded by the light of the countless torches, he struck against the goblet in the emperor's hand, and, hooting wildly and fearfully, made the vast hall ring with its unearthly echoes, as its ruffled feathers and mis-shapen form passed out of the opposite window and vanished. The guests gazed at each other in mute astonishment, the terrified monarch turned pale, and his sister Papatzin said,

"Montezuma, it is time these revels cease, this omen bodes no good to thee or thine; let the banquet cease."

"It shall be so," said the emperor, tremblingly, and with a pallid gloom settled on his brow, the proud potentate of the Aztec empire, stole from his bacchanalian board, cowering and affrighted, even in the midst of his crowd of courtiers.

CHAPTER V.

It was morn. Before the altar of sacrifice in the great temple of Huitzilopochtli, were five priests, with their bodies dyed black, and dressed in long white garments, with their heads covered with leather thongs: these were the assistants of the high priest, the sacrificer, who was dressed in flaming red robes, and crowned with green and yellow feathers; emeralds were in his ears, and from his nose depended a large turquoise. In his hand, he held a smoking heart, which had just been torn from the breast of a victim, whose body had been hurled over the great wall, and fell, a mangled mass, below, where the mad multitude, with a ravenous superstition, seized on it with the ferocity of famished wolves, and bore its fragments to their homes, like harpies, where they sated their ogre appetites with a horrible repast upon human flesh.

Victim after victim was slain, until the altar was clotted with gore, and the whole top of the vast temple was slippery with the purple floods, hot from the living veins of the unfortunate prisoners whom the Aztecs had captured in their warfare.

Hour after hour had that altar continued to reek with blood; and now the train of priests began to descend the broad stairway, which ran entirely around the exterior of the temple; they came down singing a wild chant or hymn, and, when they reached the earth the servile and fanatical mob bowed their heads to the ground as they passed. But there was one in the multitude whose form was erect, and whose black head was drawn proudly back, bridling his raven beard against his broad breast, his eyes, dark as the midnight, flashed lightning glances of anger and scorn upon the bloody troop, as they went by, howling their hideous hymn.

The multitude was immense in the vast court-yard. It was a moving mass of thousands who now hurried to a neighboring square, where, in a broad, open space, a large, round block of

granite, like a tremendous mill-stone was lying: upon it there was a man, chained by his left foot, his body was naked, save a girdle round his loins; in frame he was a giant, his face wore a noble expression, and, even in his present wretched situation, there was something in the settled determination with which he looked his approaching fate in the face, that would have almost melted the heart of the sternest foe with sympathy.

The emperor came up, borne in his litter of state, upon the shoulders of nobility, and halted near the huge stone, upon which the gladiator, who was a noble Tlascalan captive, was chained.

An officer now came forward and gave the unfortunate victim a bright and heavy falchion of itzli; he took it with a dull indifference, and dropped his fine, large head sadly upon his shoulder, and pressed his left hand to his brow in melancholy silence. An Aztec soldier now mounted the stone, and, in a moment dealt a blow at the captive; the gladiator parried it with his blade, and struck the other a returning blow which broke the soldier's arm and laid his vitals bare by a frightful gash between the ribs; the dying soldier was borne away, and another mounted the stone, and he fell likewise; and yet another met a similar fate, and even a fourth went down beneath the deadly stroke.

"Away with you! ye base born vermin!" cried a noble, springing from the earth upon the block of granite, and waving his glittering blade in the air. "Have at you, Tlascalan!" he cried, and he struck the captive a blow which nearly severed his left arm above the elbow; but, the Aztec had advanced too near, for the chained giant had thrust his sword at him with such force that its polished blade had passed through the Aztec's body, and stood a hand's breadth out behind his back.

The noble fell off the stone, but, scarcely had he touched the earth, when his brother bounded from the crowd, and stood before the captive, whose fallen arm hung bleeding by his side. In haste the new-comer struck at the victim, but missed his aim; the Tlascalan struck in return, but the wary Aztec caught the blow upon his shield, and dealt a sweep at the giant's head which sheared the ear off close to the skull! At this, the fiendish mob set up a shout of joy, as the purple streams ran down his sorrowful face from his ghastly wounded head. This frightful blow was

scarcely delivered, when the Aztec, seizing his advantage, sprang again fiercely towards the Tlascalan, with a fatally-aimed blade; but the latter stepped quickly and adroitly aside, evading the thrust, and, at that instant, swifter than a flash of light, the broad falchion came wheeling through the air, and its glittering edge struck the Aztec upon the crown and clove the head wide open to the trunk! The body sank upon the spot, and the assembled thousands sent up a shriek that pierced the ear of heaven. The wounded Tlascalan turned his sad eyes upon his dangling and lifeless arm, and the streams of tears began to flow, and mingled with the blood which coursed down his neck and cheek. The multitude stood appalled.

"Set him free!" cried Cacama.

"No!" shouted Coanaco.

"No!" joined in Cuicuitca, their half brother; "he has fought but six, another yet remains to conquer."

"But see!" said Guatemozin, "he bleeds profusely, and has defended himself nobly. I pray you, uncle, discharge him from his thralldom," continued he, turning to Montezuma.

"Nay, cousin," said Coanaco to the emperor, "command the custom to be fulfilled; the captive must conquer one more before he can be free."

"Ay, such is the law, even with us in Tezcuco," added Cuicuitca; "is it not so, brother Cacama?"

"It is, indeed," replied the latter; "but were this brave captive now in my city of Tezcuco, I would strike that chain from his feet, and he should walk forth free!"

"But, cousin," said the emperor, "custom, when it becomes law, is imperative; usage demands that he encounter a seventh antagonist, and by that usage I decree that it shall be done."

At this decision the crowd sent up loud clamors of approval; but Guatemozin, advancing with an earnest and entreating expression of countenance, exclaimed:

"Then, most gracious uncle, I pray you let the prisoner have a surgeon to staunch the blood which flows from his head, and bind his shattered arm."

"Nay," said Cuicuitca, "such a thing is unheard of in history."

"It is but the most common humanity," said Guatemozin; "it is a clemency which might be shown to a dumb brute, far less to a brave and gallant soldier relying on your majesty's mercy."

"Enough!" said Montezuma, frowning, "let the sports proceed; I have decided the law—he must fight one more!"

"Fiend!" said Malmiztic to himself, between his clenched teeth, as he turned his flashing eyes in the direction of the monarch, and shook from head to foot with agitation as from an ague.

The gladiator was growing weak very fast, from loss of blood, and his large eyes were losing their brightness.

At this period, a soldier, clothed in a coat of raw hides, mounted the sacrificial stone with cautious distrust; he bore a short but heavy maquahuatl in his right hand, and a wooden shield upon his left arm; and as he walked around the edge of the stone he surveyed the bloody but terrible captive chained before him. Of a sudden he made a feint, as if to aim a blow at the back of the victim; at the very instant of the movement the Tlascalan turned, and his red falchion was poised in the air; the soldier struck him a blow upon the wounded arm, which left it only hanging by a shred; the giant's sword came down, but the alert soldier caught it nimbly on his shield, and sprang aside in the twinkling of an eye.

"Huzza!" yelled the blood-thirsty mob.

"Bravo! my Aztec!" "Down with the dog!" cried Coanaco and Cuicuitca, who stood close to the combatants.

The Tlascalan quivered in every limb and muscle from the anguish of his pain; but his firm lips were closed with a deadly determination, and his sad eye is now glowed with the ferocity of a maddened tiger. On came the soldier, confident and elated by his success, and drawing his maquahuatl straight back over his right shoulder, he drove it forward and struck the giant full in the forehead; the weapon, turning aside, laid the white skull-bone bare, but did not cut it through. The captive fell to his knees, but rose on the instant, amid a wild yell of the multitude, and swinging his broad blade around his head, like a vulture wheeling and circling in the sun, he swept it horizontally through the air as the Aztec advanced, and with such superhuman power

and swiftness that it cut clearly through the soldier's neck, and the severed head rolled off the stone, as the body fell with convulsive twitches where it stood ! The Tlascalan pressed his hand to his bleeding brow, and reeling for a moment in his position, he sank down exhausted and fainting.

"Away with him, and sacrifice him at the temple !" cried a voice.

"Ay, sacrifice him !" echoed a thousand tongues, eagerly.

"Back ! on your lives, you villanous monsters !" thundered a throat that startled the mob like an earthquake. It was Malmiztic, who, drawing a sword of unknown metal and intense brilliancy, mounted the block, and supported the head of the nearly lifeless gladiator on one knee, while the sunbeams upon his sword almost dazzled the spectators, and his dark eyes darted forth fire in their fierce glance.

"Away with him to the temple !" shouted a huge man in the mob.

"My lord and sovereign," said Malmiztic, "command this infuriate rabble to their homes ; this man hath wrought his ransom with his own right arm. It were a horrid murder, my lord, to sacrifice him now, after he hath won his full redemption. I know him, sire, his name Tlamicol, as brave a man as any in Tlascala. I saw him spare a son of yours in battle, when he might have slain him as easily as he could have crushed a worm under his heel. Will you permit this mob of madmen to forfeit and violate all rules of right and honor ? I pray you, my liege, be more yourself, and send these human vampires away to their black dens and holes."

"Hear him not, great monarch," said the high priest, "but give this thine enemy of Tlascala's blood to appease the anger of the god of our battles ; deny it not, lest his wrath fall on you in a fearful form."

"Whist ! thou dissembling mockery of the dread fiend," cried Malmiztic, turning upon the high priest with a look as black as night. "Most noble master," continued he, "as you do love me, as you love your country, your fellow creatures, your kindred, your children, your fathers, and your gods, I pray you spare this

poor Tlascalan ! He is thy captive, not thine enemy, and even while I speak life seems flickering in his bosom, like a dying flame. Have I your answer that he shall go free ?”

“What say you, friends ?” said Montezuma, turning to the crowd.

“Off with him ! away with him to the temple !” shrieked the sanguinary herd, with a wild and furious uproar.

“You hear, Malmiztic, what they say,” continued the emperor, “it must be so, the decree has been spoken.”

No sooner were these words uttered by the monarch, than the mad mob sent up a howl of frantic delight, and the vast sea of heads swayed to and fro, waving backward and forward with violent commotion.

“Away with him at once to the altar !” exclaimed the hoarse voice of the huge man who headed the rabble.

“Hear me, Montezuma !” said Malmiztic, springing to his feet and pointing his burnished sword towards the emperor, while he fixed his glowing eyes with a piercing look upon him. “Hear me, Montezuma !” he repeated, in an awfully deep and startling tone ; “thy days are numbered, the light of thy heart has gone out, and the darkness of damnation fills its hollow chamber. Thou hast asked me to interpret thy sister’s dream for thee ; hark ! now, and tremble while you hear it : Thou hast made human sacrifice thy pastime ; the fearful rites originally made to frighten your enemies, by killing in this horrid manner all whom you chanced to capture in war, have in the late generations of your race grown to a common custom. These hell-hounds, who howl around you daily for more human flesh to feed their insatiate gods, are blood-drenched demons, and you are their dupe ; but their race is short, as well as thine. Oh ! there are other fiends, even more terrible than they, who are now waiting like dragons to crush their sin sodden forms in their giant jaws. Then quake and cower, ye priests ! ye harpies ! who feed your unnatural appetites upon human hearts, and stain day after day, your altars with so foul a dye that evening blushes at the gory sight, and leaves your horrid deeds to flickering torches, and the midnight’s gloom. Montezuma, thou Aztec king ! fortune has followed thee for years ; conquest has pressed upon conquest so

fast that thy realm hath reached both oceans ; races, civilized and savage, have bowed before thee ; the starlight of other empires has been hidden in the rising sun of thy glory ; but mark me ! thine orb hath reached its culminating point, and from this time it will rush swiftly down its sky of destiny, and be buried forever in a dark ocean of oblivion ! No morning will wake on that dead and deserted sea ; but the shadowy wings of forgetfulness will close it out forever from the vision and memory of man. Yea, monarch ! though now thy might and majesty reign supreme, there is a power coming, as yet by thee unseen, which shall shake thy massive throne to fragments under thee. Thou shalt hear this power coming, ere thou canst see its shape ; hear it like a far off tempest, which roars in the distance, and as it nears thee in its devastating course, it shall crush the forests of thy strength, hurling, in its hurricane might, the pillars of thy pride deep in the level dust ; and when it bursts upon thee in its wild and terrific rage, the foundation walls of thy palaces shall tumble and totter on their sites, until the whole shall fall in one vast ruin and universal wreck."

"Seize the traitorous Toltec !" cried Montezuma. "What ! will ye stand by, ye varlets, and hear your king and priests denounced ! your very deities insulted to their faces, by this bold worshipper of a strange god ? His speech is treason ! Away with the daring miscreant to prison ! load him with chains ! confine him in the deepest dungeon, and in utter darkness ! Why seize ye not on him, ye slaves and rascals ? Lay hold on him, I say !"

A hundred rushed toward the Toltec, but fell back trembling from his terrible glance.

"If you dare, you base-hearted wolves !" said he, slowly drawing himself back ; and, with his hand of iron grasping his brilliant blade, he continued : "Lay not your hands upon me, ye vile vermin, or I will make each foul frame a feast for the zopilote and the vulture !"

"Seize him !" shouted the monarch ; but the awe-stricken mob fell back.

"What ! do you shrink from him, you paltry cowards ?" added he. "Upon your allegiance, I command you, capture him !"

A dozen maquahuittls and swords of itzli gleamed over the Toltec's head, and around him, but swift as the stroke of lightning, the strange metal of which Malmiztic's sword was formed, shivered the brittle blades of itzli, and the maquahuittl staves were clipped by it, as stems of wheat are by the whetted scythe.—Right and left, before and behind, the desperate Toltec dealt his deadly strokes; the lifeless and wounded fell around the stone of sacrifice thick and fast; the crowd from without pressed in with overwhelming force, while those around the stone struggled furiously to fly from the dread presence of the mysterious Toltec. The pressure of the dense crowd, as they rushed together, was terrible, but the immediate space around Malmiztic was occupied only by himself and the dead bodies of those whose temerity had paid the penalty of rushing upon him. He stood erect as a statue; he moved not a muscle, but his burning eyes flashed right and left in their sockets. Not a man approached, though the chafed monarch violently repeated the mandate, "Seize him!"

The power of the multitude was paralyzed, as by a spell; all the former rumors of the Toltec's magic, sorcery, and enchantment arose in the minds of the mob; and if death could have embodied itself in a living figure, it could not have stricken more terror to their souls than the immovable form of that mystical being, as he fixed his unflinching gaze upon the figure of the emperor, who, pale with rage and emotion, was leaning upon the arms of Cuicuitca and Cacama, in a state of exhaustion.

A cry was heard from the crowd, and a moment more disclosed the form of the huge leader of the mob, who had thrown a lasso, with unerring accuracy, over the head of Malmiztic, and the running cord pinioned the arms of the Toltec fast to his body, thereby rendering the sword in his hand useless; in a moment more he was bound fast and firm in every limb.

Such volleys of shouts, screams, and yells now arose, that the sounds arising from the area echoed through the great temple and re-echoed from the hills without the city.

"To the prison's strongest dungeon with him!" cried Montezuma; "and I will make your lives the penalty of his escape."

The mob followed Malmiztic away, amid wild halloos, until he was secure in the dark dungeon, and then came back to the

temple, where the high priest, with a golden spoon, gave the heart of the noble Tlascalan to the hideous war-god as an offering.

Montezuma returned to his palace, which was near the jail, but his mind was upon a soul-rack, appetite forsook him, and his purple oclli was tasteless. Night came, but sleep came not with it, and at the dead hour of midnight, when the city was asleep, there were fearful visions flitting through the monarch's mind, as he lay with open eyes, trembling limbs, and a beating heart upon his kingly couch. Suddenly he was startled by a terrible reality: screams were heard, and looking out, he beheld the top of the huge Teocallis or temple wrapped in a red sheet of flame, and the thousand priests flying in wild disorder down the immense stairway.

In a brief space the city was aroused, and the great court-yard of the temple was black with human forms. Inextricable confusion followed; the countless priests and virgins of the sanctuary fled; and all the night long the flame shed its crimson glare over the city.

The gray morning dawned upon the blackened wreck, but no soul could divine how the tremendous temple had taken fire.

CHAPTER VI.

"I SHALL reverence Cortes, and respect his name as that of a civil, military, and religious hero, unexampled in his career; a subject who bore the freaks of fortune with fortitude and constancy, and a man destined by God to add to the possessions of the catholic king a new and larger world."—
CARDINAL LORENZANA.

IN the opening of the sixteenth century, Diego de Velasquez was the royal Spanish viceroy and governor of Cuba; the island key to the western continent; a property belonging to his most catholic majesty Charles V. Among the persons who had come from Spain to this garden island of the new world, with Velasquez, was Hernando Cortes, a man born of nobility in Medellin, a town of Estramadura, and educated in Salamanca—a character destined by nature to form a shining figure in the conquest of the western continent. He became a farmer in Cuba, and with the fortune which he thus accumulated through the labor of the natives, he conceived the design of fitting out a squadron to explore the coasts of Mexico; a region only known from the shadowy accounts of early voyagers. He was a man of good figure, bright eyes, and a black beard—a catholic crusader of the sixteenth century, in whose mind ambition, fortune, and religion were the three counterbalancing characteristics—one gifted with a physique capable of enduring the multitudinous hardships to which the yearnings of his restless spirit subjected him. He was in his third and thirtieth year when he prepared to embark from Cuba, for Mexico, in search of that El Dorado which was supposed to exist in some undiscovered country of the west. He refitted vessels, which had formed part of two different fleets which had successively coasted along Mexico and Yucatan, under the command of Juan de Grijalva, and Pedro de Alvarado. But the command of a similar exploring squadron, Velasquez had

determined to give to another person, and consequently he ordered Cortes to come ashore ; but the latter was not a man to be balked in any design upon which he had once fixed his mind, so, deciding at once upon a desperate venture, he slipped his cables by night and stood out, with his little fleet, for Mexico. When day dawned upon the harbor, Velasquez beheld it vacant ; vexed and enraged, he sent other vessels in pursuit of the fugitives ; but the search was fruitless, and ended by the loss of most of the pursuing vessels in a violent storm ; from which fortune preserved the daring Cortes and his crew, which consisted of a small but extraordinary body of men ; most of them were Spanish gentlemen and soldiers, whose objects were personal distinction and gain, combined with a love of adventure and a restlessness of spirit which could not bear the confinement of mere common life, while a realm lay before them which would furnish gold to the fortune hunter, and novelty to the romantic adventurer.

It was the age when the last sparks of chivalry blazed forth in a bright but dying flame, which was soon to go out in darkness forever. The gorgeous pageantry of the Crusades, and the era of knight errantry, had not yet become a phantasm, although it was fast fading away, like the expiring splendors of a crimson cloud at sunset. The pomp and showy magnificence of a well-arranged troop, was still an object of the highest admiration, and personal prowess lent a double dignity to authority.

Never was man more qualified for the post which he filled than Hernando Cortes ; with a vigorous intellect, he read the characters of men rapidly ; with a reverence for religion, even in its outward forms, he gained a character for piety ; and by his bold bearing and action he won their admiration and commanded their respect.

Among those who were with him was Pedro de Alvarado, a young and handsome gentleman, possessed of extraordinary grace and agility in his person, very luxurious in his habits, but greedy of gold, unscrupulous, inhumane, and violent in his spirit and character.

Gonzales de Sandoval was manly in his form, with chestnut-colored and beautifully curling hair ; a thick voice ; in age he had reached his twenty-second year ; he was free from the vice of

avarice, and he was, in the language of the admirable Clavigero, "a man of few words, but excellent deeds."

Another one of the company worthy of note, was Father Olmedo, a priest of pure character, of the church militant school, honest in his devotion to Christianity, as it was understood in the creeds of Catholicism, of which faith he was a true disciple, but one of those who held, that if true principles could not be propagated by persuasion, that the standard-bearers of the cross must use compulsion—the theological doctrine that we must be cruel to be kind, and that temporal suffering, no matter how great, is a cheap price at which eternal salvation may be purchased.

Such were some of the men who landed with Cortes on the coast of Mexico, and afterwards erected something of a fort at Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz—the Rich City of the Holy Cross.—Here they established themselves with their horses, artillery, baggage, arms, and equipage; and shortly afterwards ambassadors arrived from the Emperor Montezuma, in the city of Mexico, inquiring the object of this visit to the coast, which had not escaped the Indian monarch's system of espionage. No satisfactory answer was made to the embassy, saving general assurances of the pacific intentions of the Spaniards; with this the ambassadors departed, and in a short time afterwards, Cortes marched to the neighboring city of Chempoalla, the capital of the country of the Totonacas, a tribe who had frequently rebelled against the authority of the Emperor Montezuma.

When Cortes arrived at Chempoalla, the curiosity particles of been aroused in his companions by various thjrsued their way region, was here augmented by beholding nature seemed to be regular streets and buildings of stone, in luxuriant vegetation, the tecture, all white-washed, and presentoductions of the fertile soil, pearance, showing a cultivation far of surpassing magnitude and and the neighboring islands.

The Totonaca king received Cd through a region where the and, in a short time, an alliance w, with multitudes of pine-apple

During the period that the S¹re the plant called the viper's hospitable city of Chempoalla, a second'assoms stained with yel-the Emperor Montezuma, consisting of five disut, could be seen whose business it was to repeat the inquiries of the

bassy, and to order the Spanish to have nothing to do with their rebellious tributaries, the Totonacas. Cortes, distrusting the faith of the emperor, and conceiving this deputation as an invention to ascertain his position, secretly connived at their capture—this he effected by having them seized by the Totonacas, his allies, while he appeared to oppose it strenuously, and throw upon them the blame and burden of the insult and injury offered to their sovereign; and ultimately, by apparent intervention with the king of Chempoalla, Cortes procured the release of the ambassadors, and sent them to their master in Mexico, with assurances of the purest friendship, and the information that he would shortly visit the Capital by order of the Spanish sovereign, to pay his respects to the Emperor Montezuma.

In the meantime Cortes visited all the cities and villages of importance on and near the coast; and after sojourning for a short time in the town of Tobasco, there came to him a most beautiful Indian girl, whose name was Malinche, which was afterwards changed to Marina. She had seen the former adventurers who had explored the coast, and acquired some knowledge of the Spanish language from them. At the first glance of Cortes, she was captivated with his noble countenance, and resolved to renounce her habitation in the home of her fathers, and follow the footsteps of the Christian cavalier, who now went to Vera Cruz personal Chempoalla. He had not been long in this new station,

Never was it visible, to his clear mind, that there was disaffection. Hernando Cortes of many of his soldiers. The privations of this ters of men rapidly, and the disappointment of minds eager for outward forms, he gained discipline and restriction, made them anxious bearing and action he won a and return to Cuba. But Cortes was respect.

Among those who were with murmurs, rather than attempting to young and handsome gentlemen with a small party, to dismantle the grace and agility in his person, the mutineers were thereby quieted. greedy of gold, unscrupulous, in purposes, into which he had lulled and character.

Gonzales de Sandoval by night, the design of boring and sinking colored and beautified, and burning the remainder. reached his two disaffected soldiery beheld this they were petrified,

and the explanation which they demanded of Cortes was answered, by his saying, that he had caused the vessels to be examined, and that they were found worm eaten in their hulls, and otherwise wholly unfitted for the perils of the sea.

This bold step daunted the conspirators, who, finding no means left them of escape, concealed their mortification under the supposition that Cortes had not marked their movements ; but their scheme was betrayed ; he had fixed his searching eyes upon the traitors, and although he did not manifest any sign of having discovered the treachery, he watched them unceasingly from that hour.

Having crushed this serpent of conspiracy while it was young, he determined forthwith to strike boldly into the country, and make his way to Mexico ; accordingly, he communicated his intention to his ally, the Totonaca king, who presently furnished a large body of native soldiers, and men to transport the baggage and artillery.

In a short time, Cortes had completed his preparation, and being in readiness to start, he appointed Juan de Escalente, a brave and excellent officer, as governor, to take charge of the fort with fifty men, and left instructions with the Totonaca king to lend Escalente whatever aid he might require, in case of his being attacked by an enemy.

The preparation being completed, Cortes marched with his men and auxiliaries into the terra calienta, passing the bleak, red sands of the sea-coast, filled with its sharp, flinty particles of stone, they left the desert track behind, and pursued their way through the hot and sickly valleys, where nature seemed to be striving to outdo herself, in the rank and luxuriant vegetation, the magnificent forests, and the prolific productions of the fertile soil, which were in endless variety, and of surpassing magnitude and beauty.

Day after day, they journeyed through a region where the cactus and the giant aloe mingled with multitudes of pine-apple and other broad-leaved trees ; where the plant called the viper's head flourished with its white and red blossoms stained with yellow, over which the chayoti, or vine chestnut, could be seen

creeping ; while the more aspiring vanilla entwined in thick bowers upon the stouter underwood, beneath which flowers flourished all the year in perennial succession.

From this vast valley and hot-bed of vegetation and diseases, Cortes now mounted to the second bench or plain of country, over which the mist from the sea hangs perpetually, followed by his host of auxiliaries, who felt, from their unprotected manner of dressing, the change to this clime of clouds and fogs most sensibly. Still journeying onward, they traversed this humid region, and gradually ascended to the high, dry, and healthy division ; but, in this ascent, which, though made by almost imperceptible gradations, the Indians suffered intensely ; their want of clothing, and not being inured to mountain marches ; afflicted them sorely and severely tested their fidelity.

Here, as they progressed, could be seen the mountain palm, with its fan-like branches and spear-shaped leaves, and thousands of acacias clothed the high and steep hills through which they wound their way. Many of the allies were weary and dispirited from suffering and exposure, but the ardor of Cortes was not dampened by the moist region, nor cooled by the toilsome and perilous ascent of the mountains in their upward progress to the great plain upon the heights, upon which dense and gigantic forests were marked with vast tracts of lava, which had rolled down in fiery floods from the pinnacles of the huge volcanoes, which rose like monster spectres in their winding sheets of snow, and looked down on the black forests upon the table-land, through which the irresistible torrent of lava had rushed on its fearful and devastating way.

But ice, nor snow, nor mountain-wall could oppose such a barrier as could check the course of Cortes ; he scaled the crag, and bridged the ravine ; and where the mountain torrent had channeled out the deep barranca in the torn earth, he felled the forest trees, and made a highway for his artillery over the yawning gulf ; he dug roads around the rocky ledges of precipices, from whose overhanging heights he hurled obstructing rocks down to the dizzy depths below. Sunshine and storm were alike fruitless in changing his determined course ; he cheered the faltering,

encouraged the disheartened, and stimulated the wavering by visions of future glorious prospects and achievements, at which the heart of ambition leaped with a new impulse and life.

Weeks were spent in penetrating these interminable forests, and winding with his troops and allies through the mountain defiles and fastnesses; now in the scorching rays of the sun of mid-day, and again in the chill air and rain-like dews of the night-fall; now marching in the pure sweet breezes of the hills, and again shivering and hiding for shelter from the pitiless peltings of the storm-blast, as it burst from the mountain cloud, and ran roaring through the forest, beating and drenching the unsheltered band, whose brave leader, defying the might of the elements, suffered all without complaint, and wore a front so bold and dauntless that the haggard and despairing eye caught new life from its glance, and the fainting form pressed forward with an invigorated step, as his bold and thrilling voice bade them be of good cheer, and have firm faith upon the Virgin, who would watch over them in their perils, and never desert her children who bore on the cross of Christ!

Thus day dawned and day departed, and still they wended on their weary way; by night the ruddy glow of the volcano blazed brilliantly, illuminating the shadowed valleys and far-off forests; and in the golden gleams of the sunrise, they could catch glimpses of the huge mountain, clad in its shining sheet of silver and ermine robe of snow, while from its glittering summit rolled off the dark and lazy volumes of smoke, which stretched from peak to peak, and lay in a long rack belting the farthest boundary of the blue skies.

But the more than Roman fortitude of Cortes was the cement which held the materials of this band together; his own proud spirit led the way with a valor which inspired all of his followers; he would picture high hopes for a glorious future, and the fervor of his enthusiasm kindled, as he described, in prospective, the golden visions of wealth which were to be revealed to them. The disastrous folly of returning without having achieved anything, and the probable ire of Velasquez, for disobedience to his orders, and, again, the proud prospect of extending the Spanish dominion, and paramount to all, above wealth, the sight of unknown regions,

fame, personal pride, and honor, came the transcendent glory of bearing the radiant cross, whose blazing beams were to penetrate this temple of paganism, and illuminate its darkness by the true light of the Christian church.

With these reasons to strengthen them, and the pride of chivalry to push them onward, this handful of knights, with their intrepid leader, marched forward with the gorgeous banner of the Cross and Castile, against an unknown nation, and into the heart of a hostile country, with as much firm resolve as the most splendid party of Paladins that ever sallied forth from Europe to draw themselves up under the walls of Jerusalem, to strike terror to the hearts of the turbaned Paynim. For upon this long and weary march, it must be remembered, that the holy rites and ceremonies of the church were never neglected or forgotten; for Cortes, if he did not feel their influence himself, knew well the mystic awe and importance which attached itself to these solemn and imposing services, more especially in its effects upon the untutored minds of the wondering natives, who were his auxiliaries; and Father Olmedo, with his assistants, lost no occasion of impressing them with the great truths of Holy Writ, and the Christian faith, which, whether they understood or not, did not prevent them from becoming proselytes.

And thus marching up from the ocean, upon the central plains of the American continent, came this strange band of military missionaries, bristling with weapons, and sheathed in the panoply of war—yet preaching the gospel of the Prince of Peace!

CHAPTER VII.

MEANTIME the monarch was woefully troubled in his capital ; the authority which he had attempted to exercise over his rebellious subjects of Chempoalla had signally failed, and the imperative orders which he had dispatched to the Spanish general had been acted on diametrically opposite to his directions.

The state was in the utmost confusion and discordance, upon the manner of treating the intruding strangers. Some were for driving them back to the coast at once ; others were for allowing them to come to the capital, and then to seize upon them before they could escape from the country ; while a third party, believing them to be superior beings, and suspicious of the power of the new comers, considered that the true and only safe policy would be to treat the Christians with courtesy and kindness ; and to carry this conciliatory measure into effect, the monarch conceived that it might be attempted, and if a contrary course should thereafter be deemed advisable, such a step would be no impediment to its adoption.

The news of the arrival of the strangers had been brought to Montezuma, by messengers, the morning after the burning of the tower upon the great temple ; which inauspicious event had occurred in the night succeeding the evening upon which Malmiztic was imprisoned, the particulars of which it is necessary to state.

After the capture of the Toltec, by the huge leader of the mob, he was led by the lasso, with which he had been caught, amid the howls and shouts of the rabble, to prison ; here he was placed in charge of the jailor, with the injunction that if the latter had him not forthcoming, whenever the king should demand him, that the jailor's head should pay the penalty of his escape.

The Toltec was loaded with chains of copper, and secured in a deep, dark vault of a dungeon, far under ground, where no ray

of light could penetrate from the world without. The jailor and his assistants fastened the copper chain, with which the Toltec was bound, in a ring of the same metal fixed in the solid stone wall, which, by the yellow glare of the torches, revealed a coating of mossy-like mould; and upon the damp floor were scattered many loose skulls and decayed skeleton frames, telling of others who had pined and perished in this gloomy grave, far from the cheerful face of day, and the sunny smile of friends.

There was a moisture, a deathly clamminess, upon every object on which Malmiztic could lay his hands, save his own brow; that was hot and burning; and as the jailor and his assistants departed, with their red torches smoking in the thick air, they closed the heavy door. Malmiztic beheld the glare of the lights vanish in the distant hall, and heard the huge door close with a heavy crash, and jar behind them, and all was total darkness, an impalpable night, without one ray to illumine its impenetrable gloom; as the last glimmer of the torches vanished, the sound of the footsteps ceased, and the ponderous door swung to heavily. The Toltec turned his eyes in the direction in which they had departed, pushed back the raven locks from his forehead with both hands, and then clasped them across his broad brow, as if to suppress his intense agony, and sank down upon his knees to pray, in darkness, desolation, and loneliness of heart.

Hope had faltered as he entered this living grave, and Despair rose from the damp floor of the dungeon and threw her black mantle over him. But the Toltec's silent prayer of agony, breathed in that subterranean dwelling of death and darkness, was heard by his guardian angel, who, with its unspoken words upon his lips, shot upward from earth through the fields of ether, and entered the flower-twined gates of paradise, where he spoke that prayer through his celestial clarion, which echoed over the Elysian vales until it came to the ear of Him to whom the Toltec prayed.

The angel waited for his answer at the outer gate, when from the high battlements of heaven a herald cried :

“It is granted; the prisoner's prayer is heard!”

Down darted the spirit through immeasurable space, swifter than the flash of an eye, or the birth of a thought, and ere the

shadow of the moon had crept a span upon the earth, the angel stood at the dungeon door !

Malmiztic's mighty soul had sunken within him when he contemplated his condition ; skeletons were his companions, and freedom had fled from him forever ; the depths of his living sepulchre were too dark for the blue eyes of Hope, and finding the last ray of heaven's light departed, she closed her despairing lids to sleep the sleep which knows no waking.

No living sound was heard, not even the sigh of the night wind, or the tick of the death-watch upon the wall. Silence, darkness, and death held their triple, voiceless reign, with nothing to break its dull monotony, save one heavy, sad sigh of the overwhelmed, heart-flooded Toltec, as he clasped his hands in the exhausted, hopeless agony of despair, and fell with his face upon the cold, damp earth, among the decaying fragments of mouldering human bones. He was not dead, but sensation was gone ; the organic life had action, but the lamp of the mind had been dimmed as a star which is covered by a cloud.

Long did he lie senseless and unwitting as the skeletons which were scattered around upon the cold, wet earth of the dungeon floor. He lay as in a trance, but through his mind, half like a dream and half like a fancy, came an indistinct idea of a sound, a thing, which, in the awful silence of that dungeon vault, seemed like the very echo of a spectre's voice, the mere shadow of a sound. Again it came, indistinct and indefinite, not louder than the lightest breeze, which, dying with the daylight, lifts the leaf of the lily to kiss her ere she falls to sleep, and loses herself in a dream of darkness.

Once more it was heard, like the murmur of the sea-shell, which, though at hand, has a hum as if of a sound of far-off, roaring waters. It came again ; it was as a clod upon the coffin-lid of hope ; it awoke the sleeper.

Malmiztic rose upon one knee, his head was bent in the direction from whence he imagined the sound proceeded, and he gazed, motionless and silently through the black void towards the same spot, with one hand behind his ear and the other upon his brow ; in a moment more a beam of light caught his eye through a cranny of the wall, and gradually a huge stone was seen to

turn easily, as if upon a pivot, and in the space which it disclosed, a form appeared, bearing a blazing torch in its hand.

A thought rushed across his brain like lightning; he was no longer himself; he was not the mortal Malmiztic; he had passed the gates of death, and this was a messenger of light, sent by the Holy One, to whom he had devoted his life, and was now come to lead him to the land where the faithful find their ultimate reward.

A smile came over the countenance of the apparition, and then he doubted if this were a phantom. Again it smiled, and beauty flashed from its eyes and played around its exquisite mouth; now his mind was resolved, that smile was a human smile, and that look a living look, and one that he loved beyond all beings on the earth beside. The figure stepped through the aperture in the wall, which it had opened, and entering the dungeon, whispered in a low, sweet tone:

“Malmiztic, rise!”

“Art thou Tecalco?” said the Toltec, “or only some delightful vision of the brain?”

“No vision, but thy friend and pupil,” answered Tecalco, “and I am come to rescue thee, even at the hazard of my life; be silent and follow; question me not, until we have escaped; detection were instant death to us, and in silence and dispatch we can alone find safety.”

“Then,” replied the Toltec, “return to a spot of safety, for here you must behold me chained and powerless.”

“What!” cried Tecalco, despairingly, “were they not content to immure thee in this charnel house, but they must also load thy limbs with chains! But say, Malmiztic, has thy treasure house of thy knowledge no scheme or key to give thee liberty? Canst thou not devise some plan for thy escape? Or, if thou hast spirits at thy beck, command them now to come to thee!”

“Alas! Tecalco,” said the Toltec, “spirits wait but upon the mind, they attend not to the wants of the body.”

“But, Malmiztic,” replied the Tecalco, imploringly, “bethink you, is there no charm or spell in thy philosophy which can set thee free?”

“Fond girl,” said the Toltec, sadly, “my philosophy knows no

spells; it has no amulet or talisman whereby a miracle can be wrought; the great ring of nature is the pale of its power, it cannot abrogate those laws which were fixed when the first bright star was set in the crown of night."

"But hast thou," returned Tecalco, "nothing in thy vast laboratory of science which thou canst call to thy aid?"

Malmiztic started back suddenly, and pressing his hand upon his brow, looked fixedly upon the damp floor of the dungeon; a change came swiftly over his countenance, with the new thought which had entered his mind.

"Child of my love!" said he, "I see a ray of hope! if thou wilt venture for me."

"I will," replied Tecalco, "be the hazard what it may!"

"Then hie thee, girl, to thy father's smelting house; there thou shalt see, in the chamber where I was wont to sit, a cabinet of vases; bring me the one quaintly carved, like a pine-apple, and of a deeper blue in color than the dye of the indigo; open not its seal, nor lose a drop of the liquor it contains; it is a rare poison, but now it may save life. Wilt thou go?"

"Gladly," answered Tecalco, "and if the speed of love can hasten thy delivery, thou shalt not long remain in bondage."

So saying, the emperor's beautiful daughter passed through the wall, and turned the huge stone upon its pivot, closing the aperture as before. At this instant the door upon the other side of the dungeon grated harsh and heavily, as it swung slowly open, disclosing the form of the jailor, who entered with his torch in hand, the sharp-pointed staff of which he stuck in the damp floor of the dungeon, and said:

"Master Malmiztic, I have come to speak with you in private, for I know you must be lonely, having no one to converse with but the spirits which you command by your mysterious power; and I am here to ask your forgiveness for the part which I have been compelled to act towards you, for you must know that the king has strictly prohibited all intercourse or communication with you; but feeling sorrow for the sad condition of so proud and good a gentleman as yourself, I have hazarded to bring you, at this dead hour of the night, some small provision from my little stock to save you from hunger, which you must otherwise suffer. Ah!

Master Malmiztic, I know you better than you think for ; I care not for your agency with evil spirits, for I have seen you wandering around disguised by night, visiting the habitations of the poor and wretched peasantry, and supplying them food when they were famishing. I have marked you, Master Malmiztic, seeking the flag-thatched house of the fisherman, where his pale wife and cherished babes parched with the burning fire of fever ; and I have seen thee bend over their beds of mats and rushes, to bathe the sufferers' brows, and minister to them thy charmed medicaments, and then depart, leaving them lost as to who the friendly being was who had succored them from distress and disease. Yes, Master Malmiztic, I know these things, and though I disobey the orders of my sovereign, in furnishing thee food, yet to let thee starve in this dank, dark cell, is to my heart a greater crime than disobedience. For your safety, I must answer with my life ; but as for feeding thee, the king would not be so cruel as to have me killed for that."

"Nor shall he do so," replied Malmiztic, "for I will not eat these viands, because I need them not ; but I do not thank thee the less for thy good intention. I cannot say how I shall be disposed of ; haply, at some future time, the heart of thy monarch may melt, and Malmiztic may once more be himself. Should this be so, Aztec, I will not forget that thou didst once design to do the Toltec a favor."

Malmiztic turned his massive head towards the wall, and the jailor plucked up his torch and departed. Again the heavy door closed with a clash, and the Toltec was the companion of darkness.

The sands had run out of time's hour-glass, which marked the midnight watch, when the pivot stone turned, and Tecalco stood before Malmiztic, with a torch in one hand, and a deep blue vase in the other. The philosopher took the vase, and breaking its yellow seal, dropped its crimson fluid upon the solid links of copper. Almost instantaneously the fiery chemical eat the firm metal in holes, and the Toltec broke the chain in fragments, like a rotten bough, and walked forth free from his dungeon with Tecalco, who led the way through the wall where the pivot-stone was placed ; from this they wandered through curious winding

halls, and intricate labyrinths, now descending and again ascending, passing through vast dungeons, with serpentine passages and stairways, until after an almost interminable succession of chambers and halls were passed, they came to a small door which opened upon the royal garden of the emperor's palace; here sounds were heard of the wildest and most unearthly confusion and casting their eyes upward, they beheld the top of the great temple glowing with a lurid flame, and a countless crowd of priests and virgins flying in the wildest terror and disorder down the immense stairway.

"Now, Tecalco," said Malmiztic, "since thou hast saved me, save thyself; enter thy father's palace, and I will fly."

"Nay," answered Tecalco, "whithersoever thou shalt fly, there will I follow."

"Then, heaven protect us!" said the Toltec, throwing his mantle around Tecalco, and hurrying to a distant part of the city. Thousands, hastening through the streets, met them, but no one saw anything save the vast temple flaming in the sky; and the myriads upon myriads of flakes of fire which flew through the air, with their crimson sparks, as countless as the snow-drops hurried before a December blast. They passed this street, and that canal, and hastened through the great city, until they arrived at a fisherman's house on the lake; the fisherman and his family were standing by their hut, gazing with wonder and awe upon the red blaze which ran up into the dark sky.

"Tatli," said Malmiztic, to the fisherman, "launch my boat."

The latter glanced at the Toltec, without replying, and instantly darted into his hut, and in a moment more came forth bearing a beautiful black boat with a gold and crimson belt, and in a few moments more, with Tecalco seated in the stern and Malmiztic plying the paddle, that swift bark was flying over the lake, while the red light of the distant fire flashed upon the waves in her wake; far and fast flew that beautiful boat, until it had crossed the lake towards the hill of Tezcozincó, where, in a sheltered cove, the Toltec landed and made it secure under the shade of overhanging willows.

Tecalco and the Toltec mounted the hill together; behind them lay the quiet lake, whose surface blushed with a crimson

gleam of the expiring flames, and before them stood the mountain wall of rock ; up its precipitous and uneven sides they clambered on, the delicate daughter of the monarch scaling the crags like an antelope, and casting no thought upon her danger, as the loose stones, which formed their unsafe footing, slipped from beneath their feet, and rolled down the steep declivity. Upward they mounted, silently and unflinching, clinging now to the sharp crags, and anon seizing the dwarfish bushes which had rooted themselves in the rocky soil. Half way to the top of the hill was the ledge of a precipice, which, upon the left, was guarded by a perpendicular wall of solid rock, in its natural state, and upon the right was a dizzy abyss, so deep that the tops of the tallest trees showed their broad-leaved crowns hundreds of feet below. Carefully did the Toltec and his fair charge creep along the ledge of the precipice, leaning close to the wall of rock, whose sharp corners often rendered the passage frightfully perilous, and often would a loosened stone leap over the ledge, and rattling through the green boughs below, strike with a terrible force far down the valley.

Their hazardous course followed in a devious and dangerous way the verge of this wild precipice for considerable distance ; at length they came to the entrance of a vast cavern, whose high arching mouth reached upward even with the top of a tall mountain palm, which was rooted in the rocks. Overhanging this arching entrance, and creeping out of the crannies of the rock above, came down a thick curtain of wild vines, interlaced and commingled with which luxuriant honeysuckles, with their myriads of bright-colored blossoms, fringed the front of the cave with an impervious screen, and filled the atmosphere with a delicious and powerful perfume.

Malmiztic pushed the flowery vines aside, and they entered the cave. Beyond, where the moonlight fell through the checkered curtain of green, there was nothing visible but one black void. Malmiztic reached his hand upwards and took from a niche in the wall a small bell, and rang it thrice ; the tinkling noise sounded strangely through the hollow hall, while Tecalco stood silent and trembling by his side. But a short time had elapsed, when, through the darkness afar, could be seen a clear light, like

a single star looking through a black cloud at midnight; it advanced rapidly, and as it neared the spot where they stood, it revealed the form of a strange-looking dwarf, bearing a silver lamp in his hand; when he arrived before them, he held out the lamp to his master, and knelt at his feet. Tecalco started with affright at the appearance of this curious misshapen creature, and clasping upon Malmiztic's arm clung to him with alarm.

"Fear not," said the Toltec, "this strange object is a poor, harmless dwarf, deprived by nature of the power of speech, whom I purchased from an old woman, who was having him borne in a cage to be sold to thy father, and placed among his collection of monsters, human and animal. I learned that his unnatural mother had been in the habit of beating him without cause, and had at last abandoned the poor creature to the merciless hands of the hag who was bearing him off captive in a cage. The poor fellow made a thousand manifestations of gratitude to me for having rescued him, and I accordingly made him the keeper of this cave, where he has dwelt in a contented seclusion for years, save when I have occasionally made myself a hermit, and have dwelt with him."

This was spoken as Malmiztic was walking onward in the high broad passage of the cave, while Tecalco was observing with mingled curiosity and sympathy, the quaint dwarf as he followed their footsteps. His body was a queer hump-backed deformity, and his stature was barely four feet high, but his hands were exquisitely formed, and his face was radiant with intelligence, and beautiful in the regularity of its features; his eyes were dark and sparkling, and his large head was covered with clusters of nut-brown hair. The dwarf darted away in the dark, and in a few moments overtook them, bearing another lamp of great size, formed of copper, which he lighted from the one borne by his master, and followed on behind. Tecalco gazed upon these lamps with wonder, such vessels being unknown to the Aztec tribes; but she gave no words to her astonishment, for now, as they progressed, new wonders burst upon them every instant. The vaulted roof above was lost in an arch of darkness, through which could be seen glimmering a myriad of crystalline sparkles, and transparent formations of spar, which glittered through the gloom like

brilliant stars in blue, frosty skies ; and all the walls along their way were flashing with stalactites, as if the fires of an unending, countless array of diamonds were shedding their prismatic colors to the gleams of the passing lamps. Chamber after chamber was entered in successive order, with deep, dark domes, whose black depths their lights could not penetrate. In the centre of one of these vast chambers, they came upon a small, limpid lake, whose translucent waters flowed from countless silvery springs, which leaped from the rocky walls, and fell sparkling in the broad basin of stone below. In the depths of its colorless tide the smallest object was distinctly visible, and the margin of its unbroken mirror was strown with innumerable petrifications. Gazing upon its glassy face, they could behold the shadows of their own figures, and the reflected lustre of the lamps, together with the forms of countless shining incrustations, which blazed from the rocks around, all of which seemed magnified fifty fold beyond their natural size ; and farther onward, they came to a chamber of most surpassing beauty, the walls of which were covered with the most exquisite fossil flowers, whiter than the drifted snow, and as transparent as the most delicate sea-shells.

In the centre of this room stood three tables of solid native alabaster ; they were of different sizes and shapes, and were called, by Malmiztic, the goblin, gnome, and fairy tables ; over each hung a drapery, whose snowy folds of stone appeared so light that a breeze would have lifted them. Several stools of white marble stood around each crystal table, and upon two of these Malmiztic and Tecalco seated themselves, while the dwarf hastened to bring and spread before them the greatest variety and profusion of delicious fruits, and the whitest bread, together with solid goblets of gold, filled with the purest water. After their wholesome and simple repast was finished, they waited for the dwarf, who had been absent for a considerable time ; at length he returned, and they all went forward through a long suite of rooms of the most singular shape and appearance, adorned upon the walls with thousands of rosettes of stone, and fairy-like fossil blossoms.

They now entered a vast hall, and before them stood a tall, white, foam-covered column, whose base was in the centre of the

level floor of stone, and its head rose up until it was lost in the darkness above. Upon this beautiful shaft were carved numberless figures and devices. Passing from this great hall, through a narrow crevice of the rock, which afforded barely space for their bodies, they suddenly emerged upon a wide aisle, where the most gorgeous and splendid spectacle conceivable burst upon their sight! it was a magnificent cathedral, with its mimic pulpit and sanctuary, high-arching dome, studded with stars, and hanging with millions of glittering prisms, which glowed with all the dyes of the rainbow, from the light of twenty superb silver lamps, which burnt upon the altar, around which altar twelve stupendous pillars of gigantic girth seemed reared aloft to support the huge, dark arch of the starry ceiling.

The altar itself was of a solid, black, massive marble, and carved with tens of thousands of hieroglyphics, in some strange or unknown tongue. Behind it, in the deep niche of the wall, were arrayed a number of mysterious looking mummies, the silent watchers of the sanctuary, who, robed or wrapped in their yellow shrouds, with their hands crossed on their breasts and their eyes closed, gave an awful solemnity to this majestic subterranean temple, whose entire walks, upon every side, were hung with festoons of frosted flowers, and quaint shaped figures of stone; and, embedded in the wall behind and above the sanctuary, was a smooth, polished block of black marble, upon which was graven, in broad letters of gold, in Toltec characters:

“THE TEMPLE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD—THE CAUSE OF CAUSES.”*

After having gazed at this stupendous miracle of nature, Tecalco was led by Malmiztic through a vaulted doorway of alabaster, where a scene of most terrific grandeur presented itself. It was a vast frightful gulf of liquid fire, where, like a boiling caldron, a subterranean volcano heaved and bubbled in a bed of whitened and sulphur covered rocks; and far down in the yawning crater could be heard the rumbling of stones, and the roaring of the lava, as it rose and subsided in its fiery and seething bed. Dark, rolling volumes of steam and smoke swept

* “Sunt characteres a nostris valde dissimiles. * * * * *Ægyptias fere formas æmulantur.*” “De Insulis nuper inventis,” etc.—PETER MARTYR, p. 11.

through a vast flue and disappeared in the distance, and Tecalco was so stunned with the deafening roar, and oppressed with the intense heat, that they returned through many chambers, until they came to one in which Malmiztic had formerly spent his time in study.

It was an elegant apartment, furnished in the most sumptuous manner, with every convenience which luxury could invent; a superb couch, tastefully decorated with curtains of azure and gold, occupied one side, and an immense mirror of itzli, beautifully brilliant, leaned against the opposite wall. Exquisitely wrought mats, of aloe leaves and feathers, carpeted the solid stone floor, and every comfort which the realm could furnish had been lavished upon this boudoir of the cave.

Here, the dwarf and the Toltec parted from Tecalco for the night, after the former had performed some bewitching strains of music upon a strange lute-like instrument, with which the emperor's daughter was delighted. And long after the fair girl had lain down upon her magnificent couch, the wild notes of those melodies lingered in her ear, until when sleep came, that soft music became a part of her dream; and before the dwarf departed, he had lighted a taper of the most ravishing perfume, which shed its sweetness around, and the silver lamp threw its soft radiance, all the night long, upon the unbroken slumber of the beautiful Aztec maiden.

CHAPTER VIII.

As Cortes advanced into the heart of the enemy's country, he deemed it advisable to send an embassy of his Totonaca allies to Tlascala, to make an amicable arrangement for the passage of his troops through that territory ; these were accordingly dispatched, together with the beautiful Indian girl, whom Cortes had obtained in Chempoalla, whose name was Malinche, or as she was otherwise termed, Marina, who acted as interpreter. But this attempt at negotiation resulted in a signal failure, for the senate of Tlascala, after a stormy debate, determined to refuse the strangers admittance into, or the freedom of passing through, their territory ; and this policy was supported with a fiery zeal by young Xicotencatl, the prince of Tlascala, a noble warrior, and an intrepid member of the senate. In this he was opposed by their elected king, who was an old man, and a number of others ; but notwithstanding, the majority of their assembled body advocated, in the strongest terms, the immediate expulsion of the Spaniards. But Cortes had determined to go to Mexico by the way of Tlascala, although he had been repeatedly advised to take a different route, namely, by the city of Cholula ; and it was well for him that he did not adopt this route, for Montezuma had given orders to the Cholulans to levy an immense force, and annihilate the Spaniards and their auxiliaries, if they attempted to pass that city.

The next day, after the return of the embassy, with the refusal by the senate of the demands of Cortes, an army of a thousand Tlascalans marched out to meet him. The battle was bravely fought, but notwithstanding the courage of the enemy, the Christians defeated them most signally, and in the course of the conflict the shouts of the Tlascalans could be heard upbraiding the Chempoallese or Totonacas, for coming under cover and protection

of the Christians, when they dared not have ventured thither alone.

In the midst of the fight, a challenge passed between two nobles, one of the Chempoallese, the other, a Tlascalan. Hostilities had a cessation, and the two contending armies halted to witness the duel. The combatants were splendidly attired, and armed according to the custom of the country. It was a passage of arms in the true cavalier style, and won the admiration of the knightly Spanish observers, as well as the Indians upon each side. The conflict was sharp and severe; now the activity of one would prevail, and again the strength of his opponent would throw the advantage upon the other side. The fray grew fierce and bloody, until at last the Totonaca, by a desperate blow, felled his antagonist to the earth, and cutting off his head carried the bloody trophy back in triumph to his companions in arms, amid their shouts and acclamations of applause. The Tlascalans, beholding their champion defeated, retreated in good order to their city, while the Christians and allies encamped near the scene of their victory.

On the morrow the brave young Xicotencatl led ten thousand of the choicest Tlascalan warriors once more against the Christian camp. Never had an army issued from Tlascala whose appointments were equal to this. The day was bright and glorious, and the broad sun rolled through the blue heights of an unclouded heaven. Over the green, grassy plain carpeted with flowers of the most enchanting hues and fragrance, came the pride and flower of the Tlascalan forces, marching down upon the Spanish camp with a firm and unterrified front. It was a splendid pageant to behold this brilliant army, many of whom were the nobles of the republic, clad in the most magnificent mantles of feather work, and with burnished armor of gold, silver, and copper sheathing. It was a sight to thrill the soul of a knight-errant, to mark the firm-paced march of the glittering battalions, as they moved onward with order and regularity, to the stirring sounds of atabals, drums, and horns. On they came; proudly over the green and sunshiny plain fluttered the bright banners of a hundred chiefs; and high over all, flashing in the light came the great gold spread-eagle, the standard of the republic of Tlascala.

As the mighty body moved down, with their burnished arms blazing in the sun, and gorgeous insignia waving in the wind, Cortes drew up the Christian forces and the allies in battle array, and led the van in person. This course was displeasing to the Totonaca chieftain, who felt that he should have this opportunity of revenging the ancient grudges arising from feuds between the two nations; but this was soon forgotten in the fury of the contest which ensued.

Xicotencatl, having his forces in readiness, now struck the loud drums for the charge, and the hoarse wind instruments brayed forth a stormy peal; as, with a rush of flying banners, fluttering pennons, and the clash of opposing arms, the two armies met in conflict with a terrific shock.

Maquahuitls and blades of itzli glistened in the light, and a cloud of arrows, darts, and other missiles, flying through the air, darkened the face of the sun with their shadows, and descending pierced the defenceless heads of the Totonacas, while they glanced harmlessly off from the bright steel bonnets of the Christian cavaliers.

Wild shouts arose from the Tlascalan lines as they repeated, with rapidity, their fierce and sweeping charges. Troop after troop of their gaily-dressed warriors, with the sunbeams dancing on their shields, wheeled down upon the opposing ranks with a tremendous onslaught, sweeping the Chempoallese before them like the brown leaves hurried by the autumn blast.

Cortes now called for his cavalry, and as the ranks opened to allow them to pass, the Tlascalan enemy beheld the horses with consternation; these strange animals, which, with their riders, they looked upon as one Centaur-like creature, came clattering down with their sharp-shod hoofs over the green-sward, while the long lances and keen swords of the knights cut through the ranks of the confused and disordered enemy, until the dead and wounded lay in winrows along their pathway.

Right and left flew the scattered and terrified Tlascalans, their gorgeous banners and splendid ensigns hurled to the earth in ribbons and fragments; and now, the wild yells of the Totonacas were heard as they rushed after the flying foe with murderous slaughter, dragging in the dust the proud Tlascalan nobles, with

their superb surcoats, beautiful adornments of gems, and gold glittering collars, and embroidery, whose exquisite workmanship no oriental land could equal.

Fast fled the foe, and fast upon their footsteps came the fiery Chempoallese, fierce and hungry for revenge and for blood. The rout was terrible; of the ten thousand splendidly equipped warriors, whom Xicotencatl had that day led into the field, with their green and crimson plumes floating in the golden sunshine, and their burnished armor flashing brilliantly with every evolution, there now returned towards Tlascala a decimated and disordered band, weary, wounded, and stained with blood and dust; a wretched wreck of the proud host which had so lately sallied forth quick with life and burning with high hopes of victory.

But in the camp of the Spaniards that night, joy held a crimson revel over the blood-bought trophies of their triumphant action, and Father Olmedo, with his officiating priests, offered praise and thanks to Him in heaven, whose hand they conceived they could behold giving them these wonderful successes.

Not long after this disastrous defeat, in which the Tlascalans were so completely overthrown, the senate concluded to attempt to achieve by stratagem what they could not accomplish by military power; consequently they sent a deputation of fifty spies, who were to talk pacifically with the Christians, but in fact reconnoitre the camp of Cortes, and ascertain the character and amount of his forces. They accordingly came, and were acting, apparently, with no hostile intent, but the Chempoallese allies chanced to discover their design, and Marina, the Indian girl, revealed to Cortes, likewise, the plot of these spies, which she had detected. When the Spanish general heard these things, he had the fifty Tlascalans arrested, and being determined to strike terror to the hearts of his adversaries, he caused them to be brought forth, and had their hands cut off!

In this horrid and mutilated condition, he sent them back to Tlascala, where their bleeding limbs were presented to their fellow-countrymen. This, instead of terrifying them, only excited the ire of the Tlascalans, and they determined, contrary to all former custom of the country, to make an attack by night, and in a short time they were all prepared, and a favorable

opportunity presenting itself, they sallied forth in the direction of the Christian camp, which was situated upon the slope of a large hill. The Tlascalans approached, under the cover of a cloudy night, with stealth and caution ; every means was used to avoid detection, and a deadly retribution for former injuries and defeats was now intended.

Quietly as the panther creeps upon its prey, did the crouching Tlascalans advance close to the Christian camp ; but the careful Cortes was not to be taken by surprise, nor found in an unguarded condition ; his well-drilled soldiers slept not on their posts, but watched their quarters with a vigilant eye.

At length, upon a signal being given, the Tlascalans rushed upon the camp ; in a moment the soldiers, who slept upon their arms ; were up and equipped, prepared in an instant to repel their antagonists. The conflict was terrible. In the midst of the darkness it was almost impossible to distinguish the Totonacas from the Tlascalans ; but the Spaniards fought with the fury of tigers, and dealt their deadly blows with such effect that they repulsed the enemy sufficiently for Cortes to comprehend more clearly their number and position, and to consolidate his forces, as well as to array the allies in something like order. But this was no slight task amid the stunning confusion of arms, and the horrible clang of the Tlascalan horns and drums, and the wild shouts of the fighting foemen, mingled with the death-shrieks and screams of the wounded and dying. And now, the Tlascalans would urge their men on by the remembrance of their fellow-countrymen, whose arms had been so bloodily amputated by the invading foe.

Loud and long raged the fierce strife in darkness and confusion ; at length the great white moon, in her full-orbed glory, rolled out in majestic splendor and brilliancy, from behind a black mountain of clouds, fringing its ebon masses with a glorious wreath and edging of gold, and scattering in a broad flood upon the field a silver shower of light. With this sudden change in the skies, the tide of battle turned, for the Christians and their companions were soon collected by Cortes in one compact body, which, charging upon the Tlascalans, swept them down the hill and through the valley, as if by an irresistible torrent. They

pursued them over hill and dale for miles, strewing with their corpses the fields as they fled, and making their track bloody with the gore of the wounded, who desperately struggled to escape from the unfortunate field of fight.

Cortes and the Christians returned at length to their camp, but the Totonacas followed the enemy until they were wearied out with butchery, plunder, and pillage ; at last, having deeply sated their long-cherished revenge, they returned and made a horrible feast of the bodies of those whom they had slaughtered, notwithstanding the efforts of Cortes to prevent it ; but his power was too limited to offer any forcible means to compel them to desist, well knowing that at this time their services were invaluable, and, in fact, the only safeguard for himself and companions against the countless thousands whose territory he had invaded.

The golden eagle of Tlascala had been beaten to the earth by the storm of the Christian power, but it now rose again, like a new-fledged phoenix, from its funeral pyre, and mounted aloft more daring and terrible than ever.

The senate and the people now saw that their situation was a desperate one, and therefore they nerved themselves for a contest which should seal their fate or sweep the Christians from their soil at one overwhelming blow.

They accordingly came forth, thousands upon thousands ; in the language of that mighty master of history, who opens the sable curtains of tradition, and illumines the black void with beautiful beings and vivid figures of light—in the words of the great Prescott—"they came forth, a mighty host, dark with the shadows of banners." Thousands of common soldiers, with fantastically painted bodies, and no dress save a girdle around their loins, and others with spotted skins, and like garments—the wealthy with cuirasses of gold and silver, and their legs defended by leathern boots, or their feet by sandals. The whole body being armed with various implements of defence, such as copper-headed lances, bows, arrows, darts, slings, pikes, swords of obsidian, clubs, spears, maquahuitls, and barbed javelins, with a cord attached to them to pull back and lacerate the flesh after they had pierced the body of the victim at which they had been hurled ; and shields of wood or hides, likewise nets, to entangle

the arms of the enemy, together with drums, horns, shells, and other martial music.

Such were the equipage and adornment of the mighty mass which now moved forth from Tlascala, with all the appointments of war, and a determination to leave not a single Christian to tell the tale of his companions.

And now the Christian cavaliers had need of all their courage and chivalry, for they beheld the enemy for miles, coming countless as the sand grains in the simoon. It was a fearful sight to the little band and their rude allies, to mark the multitudinous swarms as their dark lines became more and more distinct, while the distance between them diminished momentarily. They seemed multiplying as they moved forward with a fearful calm, like the gathering clouds which collect in silence and hasten together in one great body, before the monster angel of the tempest gives his thunder-shout and sweeps away on his black wings, followed by the legion of hurricane fiends, who hiss and howl in their roaring flight after their rushing leader.

It was a fearful sight, and the hearts of the Christians beat as with a single pulse, at the impending destruction which threatened them; and the mighty mind of Hernando Cortes felt terrible misgivings at the appearance of the dread power which now approached. A shadow of doubt clouded the sunshine of his hope, but no eye that looked upon that leader could see this shadow, for upon his countenance sat a deathless determination, and his firm lips were sealed with fixedness of purpose, as he glanced over the flashing lines of the coming host. There was no flinching or wavering in his collected aspect, or the bold bearing of his manly figure; he looked quietly and calmly upon the advancing legions, and turned to his men and confederates, and with an eloquence like electricity struck fire to their souls, and fortified the faltering by the cheering assurance that the prayers of the holy fathers had been heard, and that the Virgin would guard her cherished flock, and hover over the field of fight, while unseen angels would battle under the banner of the Cross.

Down came the cloud of foes upon the Christians and their companions, countless as a swarm of locusts, and flying thick in the faces of the Christians and Chempoallese as the whirling

flakes of snow in a northern storm. Down to the earth went the Totonacas, as the rushing charge of Tlascala swept over them, in one wild irresistible wave ; and on dashed their great warrior, Titcala, with his banner of a snow-white heron, upon a rock, conspicuous among the hundred thousand warriors. And all over the field standards were seen flying hither and thither, fluttering and waving as they were borne swiftly on where the tumult and strife were most terrific. Now a green bird, wrought on a tree of gold, the arms of one of the proudest nobles of Tlascala, was seen, and before his dreadful banner the Totonacas were whirled away, or dashed instantly in the dust ; and even the Christian flank fell back as the green bird forced its way with a deadly impetuosity through rank after rank, and division after division ; and following in the rear came a hundred other standards of the Tlascalans, as swift as flocks of pigeons, and as countless in their unnumbered multitude. Upon every side the Christians and their comrades were hotly pressed, and no sooner was a gap opened in their files, than like a rushing inundation of mighty waters, a torrent of Tlascalans poured upon them. The allies were thrown into consternation and dismay, and pressed down by their innumerable opponents, the confusion which followed was frightful ; panic seized upon them, which the Tlascalans observing, followed up their advantage with most disastrous slaughter.

In every part of the field, the allies gave back from the fierce assaults of the Tlascalans ; this Cortes saw, and felt that unless a master stroke was now made, that he and his hopes were lost forever. He now raised in his stirrups, and dashed forward to clear a way for his artillery, when full before him came the terrific Tlascalan chief, with the banner of the green bird, carrying death with it in its wild career. Cortes checked not his reins to curb his charger, but drove his spurs into the sides of his steed, and dashed at the Tlascalan, with his lance in the rest and his visor down, and drove his dreadful spear through the body of the terrible chieftain !

Cortes now opened the way for the artillery and cavalry, the former of which began its dreadful work of execution. As the great guns belched forth their bursts of flame and thunder, start-

ling a region whose echoes had never answered the wild roar of cannon previous to that time, appalling was the havoc which succeeded every sulphurous flash; rank reeled upon rank, and file fell upon file as these frightful engines mowed the Tlascalans to the earth like the scythe of death; through the dense crowded mass flew the destructive balls, strewing the field with rows of mangled corpses, and hundreds of wounded wretches who shrieked from agony, until their screams pierced the ears of their companions with horror, and they fled in terror and confusion from the scene of such ghastly carnage.

Now could the credulous and faithful followers of the cross fancy that they could see St. James, their patron saint, scouring the plain on his milk-white steed, and scourging the enemy, like the spectre of death upon his pale horse. Bloody and shocking was the massacre which ensued.

An embassy, which Montezuma had sent to Cortes, now arrived, and they beheld, for the first time, the tremendous (and, as they were convinced, superhuman) power of the Christian arms. Disorder seized the entire mass of the Tlascalans, and one universal rout ensued; utter despair seized upon the poor creatures, and in their helplessness they fell a prey to the rapacious ferocity of the allies.

Thus ended the last battle between Cortes and the Tlascalans, in which the latter were utterly defeated and overthrown, with the loss of a vast number of their choicest soldiery; and soon after this brilliant victory, Cortes and his companions, together with their Totonaca allies, made a most splendid entry into the city of Tlascala. Triumphal arches were erected and festooned with garlands of the loveliest flowers which could be found in a land where blossoms blushed from the beginning to the closing of the year. Wreaths of roses and fragrant honeysuckles were woven as chaplets for the conquerors, and fairy-like flowers were strewn in their pathway.

It was a rare sight for those who had been so long enduring the hardships of a mountain march, and the rigors of an open camp life, to enter a splendid city, where all the comforts of life awaited them; and in remembrance of the kind gifts which heaven had thus bestowed upon them and their ultimate success,

the holy Father Olmedo celebrated the service of high mass, in all the majestic pomp and magnificence with which it could be clothed—a ceremony in which many Chempoaltese converts performed conspicuous parts. The mysteries of baptism and the holy sacrament were administered, and all the solemn rites of church, which were looked upon by the ignorant natives as a most mysterious ritual—a conclusion, in fact, which need not astonish the reader in the nineteenth century.

The Mexican embassy, having seen the power of the new comers, and presented the offerings which Montezuma had dispatched to Cortes, returned to their island city, with news of this new people, which made the Aztec monarch tremble on his golden throne.

CHAPTER IX.

It was night in the capital—the multitude were busy with the news of the strangers who had conquered Tlascala, and many were the conjectures which filled the minds of the uneasy citizens of the great metropolis as to what course the monarch would take in the matter. A few thought he would admit them peaceably; others imagined that he had some deep laid scheme to inveigle and entrap them, while the great mass confidently believed that the emperor was only luring the foe into his lair, and that suddenly he would call forth his infinite forces and sweep them from the earth's face at one tremendous blow.

While the citizens were thus busy talking in groups in the streets and public places, the emperor held his council in the palace; the news was most exciting which was there communicated by Cacama, the brave young king of Tezcuco, namely that his brother Ixtliloxchitl had raised a sedition in one of the neighboring provinces, and gathering a considerable body of rebels and restless spirits, had gone over and joined the Christian, Cortes, and entered upon friendly terms with their ancient enemy, the Tlascalans.

This piece of news was not needed to make the monarch, Montezuma, more nervous and agitated than he was, for, of late, he had almost been driven to desperation by an endless variety of annoying circumstances, among which was the miraculous escape of Malmiztic, and the sudden disappearance of his daughter, Tecalco.

In the morning after the escape, Montezuma had the jailor brought forth, and was about to deliver him to the priests to be offered up as a sacrifice, when Guatemozin interfered with his uncle on behalf of the jailor, and prayed that the

culprit might be allowed a short time to search for the fugitive Toltec.

"Why, Guatemozin," said Montezuma, "would you have this knave, who has connived at the escape of this blaspheming infidel, escape likewise?"

"Nay, uncle," answered Guatemozin, "I can but think that there is some higher power at work than this simple-minded jailor, for he is an honest man, and has been faithful to the trusts of his office for years. Have you heard aught of the manner in which the prisoner escaped?"

"Nay, not a word," replied Montezuma, "save that the daring traitor, who outraged the gods of my fathers, and balked and bearded me in mine own capital, is gone. By the wrath of Huitzilopotchtli! I would not have let him out of my hands for all the Tlascalans themselves. Heard you not how, with horrid sacrilege, he defied our gods and assailed me as if I were the veriest slave? yea, spoke as proudly to me as if I were an earthworm, creeping at his feet."

"'Tis true, uncle," returned Guatemozin, "he has a pride without a parallel, but I think he has a more fearful power than pride, and even I begin to side with those who think that this is some mysterious power, whose strength may not be checked with impunity; for, know you, sire, that the solid links which held him in the night, I saw myself, in the morning, as rotten as a reed decaying in a fen—it crumbled at the touch."

"Ah! say you so?" questioned Montezuma, musingly, "I had thought that dread of him was confined to the vulgar herd, but lately we have seen things which must stagger even our belief. Guatemozin, there is something in him that we know not of."

"Ay, uncle," answered the other, "let me beseech you, therefore, to grant this poor jailor a few days' life, to learn the whereabouts of this strange and mystical man. I will pledge myself to answer his return when the period shall expire."

"Not so," said the emperor, "for I could not make thee answerable for his knavery or neglect, but I will permit him to make the search, and if he return not at the end of the tenth day, then shall his wife and children pay the forfeiture and answer with their lives."

"A thousand thanks, uncle!" replied Guatemozin, "for this clemency—farewell."

So saying, he departed for the gardens of the palace, where he had promised to meet his cousin, the beautiful Tecuiclipó. After having communicated to the jailor the respite allowed him, in which he must find the Toltec, the poor jailor started upon his almost hopeless search, and Guatemozin to the lovely grove within which he was to find the being upon whom all the tender ties of his nature were concentrated.

He came and found her; she was sitting under the shadow of a broad-leaved magnolia, whose white blossoms distilled a perpetual incense upon the air. There was a grief which weighed her down as she bent her head upon her bosom, like a dew-laden lily; and Guatemozin, coming gently up, stole upon her unseen in her reverie, and covered her eyes with his hands as he stood at her back.

"Ah! I know you, bold one" said the maid, "for I can see thee as well with the inner eyes as when I gaze upon thy face; but I am not in playful mood to day; so, sit thee down while I shall tell thee something which thou shalt not like to hear. But first tell me," said she, placing one hand upon his shoulder, as he sat by her side, "hast thou ever loved me?"

"What a question!" returned he, looking archly and reproachfully, as he turned his large, dark eyes upon hers; "have I told thee this so often that thou wouldst amuse thyself by hearing me repeat the same strain over for the hundredth time?"

"Not so," replied the beautiful maiden, and her deep eyes grew softer in their lustrous loveliness; "not so, I would never hear it again."

"How, now!" said Guatemozin, half surprised, "what is my offence?"

"None," answered Tecuiclipó, "I only ask that you will cease to remember me."

"Nay, now, I see that you are wounded," said Guatemozin, "at some accidental word of mine, some act without intent; nay, then, be frank, and speak it out, and I will ask forgiveness, for, by the ashes of mine ancestry! I know not wherein I have offended."

"'Tis no offence," added the maiden, "but an error in loving me."

"Why, how is this?" said Guatemozin, more seriously, "have I been deceived; have all your fond words been false, and can you have thus long dealt doubly by me? Tecuiclipó! it cannot be! Why, year after year have I lived in thy smile; I have wandered with thee in the flowery hours of childhood, and plucked roses from the same branch; I have sat on the green, moss-covered banks, where wild flowers flowed at our feet, and told thee the strange legends of Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl, of the holy hermit who dwelt so far up on the mountain pinnacle that all earthly sounds were lost, and silence was so solemn and unbroken that the dead stillness of that wondrous height was painful in the extreme; I have read to thee the wild romances of the ancient Olmecs, until thy bright eyes have overflowed at the touching stories of ancient love; I have sung to thee by the moon's white light, when the tears of the stars were falling upon the grass and into the open cups of the night flowers; and I have wandered with thee by wood and water, where the forest over-shadows the brook, the deep blue brook whose mirror-like face gave back our images doubled as we stood upon its bank, arm entwined with arm, and gazed at our shadows, those watery mockeries which followed our every movement. By the blue eyes of Tlaloc, Tecuiclipó, those memories come back to me so bright and beautiful, that when I hear thee say that loving thee is an error, it robs my life of its most exquisite visions—those golden hours of my boyhood, when hope was the highest in my heart, when life was fresh, and new, and beautiful; when day came not too soon, and gentle dreams were the visitants of my happy slumbers. Then I was not weary when returning from the toilsome chase, for I could look into those divine and love-lighted eyes, and see a sunny smile, which seemed to wear a welcome for me in every glance; then I was not sorrowful, if I could hear thy happy voice ring with its merry laughter, or warble forth its own wild and witching melodies."

"No more, no more, Guatemozin," said the beautiful maid, and her liquid eyes were suffused in tears, "I would not have the past revived, to contrast its hours of exquisite enjoyment

with the weary years which are stored for me in the future, years of sorrow, when the heart will pine in its own solitude, or live only upon recollection of pleasures past forever."

"What mean you, Tecuiclipo," said Guatemozin, "these words mean nothing, or else they shadow forth a great revulsion in thy feelings."

"Yes, Guatemozin," answered she, "a change is coming over my fate not my feelings; this hand, which has so often trembled with delight in yours; these eyes, which have so oft gazed with rapture upon your own; this heart, whose extatic pulses have so often throbbed in unison with the beating of your own—all, all must be lost! yea, even the very dreams of my mind must cease to picture that object which once was life, light, hope, and heaven to them!"

"Tecuiclipo!" said Guatemozin, earnestly, "is this madness, or are all our former vows forgotten? Say, in a word, what means this? Keep me not in suspense, for my mind hangs in torture while I am thus left in vague uncertainty; give not shadows, but facts; delude me not with a fiction, a phantasm, but if I must meet some dread spectre, let me meet it now, before my nerves are shaken by this distressing doubt. My soul's own idol, speak, I conjure you! for I see your eyes full of tears which have welled up from your heart, and I know this painful matter must be spoken."

"Oh! Guatemozin," said the maid, "how I have loved you would be so wild a tale the world would laugh to hear it; the very rhapsodist would wonder if such a thing could exist in nature; it were a marvel too fabulous for fiction, so far beyond belief, that sober thought would set it down as an invention and coinage of the brain, for whose reality there was no prototype. For you, even as a boy, began my dream of love, and as you grew, my girlhood's passion took a deeper hue, and every honor which you added to your growing fame, in war or in peace, was a new source of pride to the heart which held your welfare and interest more precious than its own. Ah! Guatemozin, I have listened to the winning music of your words until my heart was haunted by its echo; and then how I have dwelt upon thy treasury of thought, from which, as from an inexhaustible mine,

new gems came glittering in continuous succession, rare, delightful, more than ever precious and bright, as time stole along, adding ever to the priceless stock of thy native and original genius. And thus have years passed, until my soul has grown a deep, dark lake, which lightens up but in thy glance, and wears a silver face only when thou art present. But now, Guatemozin, the dream is over; all that I have asked and hoped from fate has been denied and swept away at one fell blow. Hear me calmly, friend of my sunny youth, I, who have loved thee so fondly for years, I, I am to be our uncle's bride!"

"Shades of our Aztec gods forbid!" exclaimed Guatemozin; "what! I who have worshipped thee night and day for years, to be rejected thus, and for thy father's brother, Cuitlahua, prince of Iztapalapan! This is a cruel blow, to yield thee to him whose stern and immovable heart can feel no more for thee than for the basest slave who waits upon his wants, while I, oh, heavens! have loved thee to idolatry! True, he is wise, but his wisdom will not see thy worth; true it is, that he is brave in battle, but of love for woman, and most of all for thee, he knows naught. Tecuiclipa, this blow hath cut my heart in twain; I had rather have heard that thou wert given to a barbarous Otomie, or even to my Tlascalan enemy; yea, I would have sooner heard that thou wert a virgin of the temple, or a common sacrifice to the gods, than to have learned that thou art the promised bride of my uncle. If it had been my enemy, I could have borne it, for then the hope of one day meeting him in the field, where I might win thee back, would have made life bearable; but this cuts off all hope, and strikes me in the most defenceless part. Cuitlahua, though a stern man, hath been my friend, my tutor, my companion, my uncle! yea, almost my father! and now he shoots like a shadow between me and all the sunshine of my future joys."

"But, Guatemozin," said Tecuiclipa, "the voice of my father hath spoken the fatal decree, and his is the voice of fate."

"It were a most unholy determination," answered the other, "for there is no fitness in the match; he is old, and thou art young; he is icy as the northern face of Orizaba, whilst thou art as warm and sunny as the flowery vales of Xochimilco; his stern soul sees nothing half so winning as the bloody streams of the

battle-field, while all thy delights are centered in seeing those around thee happy ; his heart is of itzli, stony and unimpressible, while thine trembles with sympathy at the sigh of sorrow, and thine eyes distil their amber tears at the sight of scenes of woe."

"Whist ! and away !" said the maiden, rising, "I see my father approaches ! We must not meet again ; farewell, Guatemozin ! when I am gone, forget me, blot me out forever from the book of thy memory, and scatter the flowers of affection which have pressed its leaves and been treasured therein for years.— Look upon me as you look upon the dead ; between us is a barrier which no hand but death's can remove ; take my hand for the last time, my hand alone, for my heart is dead within me !"

Guatemozin took that hand, and pressed her beautiful form to his manly bosom, while her large, tear-filled eyes were upturned to meet his own, as he said, with the deepest tenderness and emotion :

"Farewell, if we must part, farewell, sweet blossom ! thou, who hast made me more happy in my past earthly existence than I can ever hope to be in heaven, adieu ! And now, for the last time, shall our lips meet in extacy of union ; when this fond, wild moment is gone, the future will be a blank to me, and I shall live in the past alone.

Their lips met, and a deep thrill of joy ran trembling through their frames, their hearts swelled full, and they were speechless, until gushing from the soul springs their tears streamed forth at one moment, as if from the self same fountain. It was a moment of bitter pleasure, a rapture of agony, a blending of the delicious waters of delight with the salt and dark stream made brackish by the tear-drops of sorrow. A moment more, and Guatemozin was gone ! And issuing from a forest of flowering shrubs came the emperor and his attendants ; the gorgeous retinue swept by and wended their way to the palace gates, and Guatemozin marked the steps of Montezuma with an altered heart ; little did the monarch know how he had been loved by his nephew, and little did he dream how he had severed the roots of a deep-planted affection, by giving his lovely child to Cuiclahua, and forgetting the noble youth who had doated on her for years.

CHAPTER X.

UPON the night succeeding that which Tecalco had spent in the Toltec's cave, she started, in company with Malmiztic and the dwarf, for a distant hill called Tezcozinco. They journeyed through the beautiful valley by moonlight, and the exquisite lake lay in the bosom of the vale like a shield of shining pearl, resting upon the broad breast of a huge black giant sleeping in his armor. When they arrived at the base of the hill they came upon a very small cottage ; Malmiztic softly blew a whistle which he had, and the door was opened by a woman of most remarkable appearance ; she had been surpassingly beautiful, but she was now far past the prime of life ; the contour of her face told at a glance that she was a Cholulan ; her brow was broad and beautiful, even though time had worn his traces in it, and embrowned its once clear surface with a dusky tinge or stain ; but her eyes were inexpressibly fine, and burned amid the lost loveliness of her face like a lamp in a sepulchre shining upon withered flowers.

“ Cola,” said Malmiztic to the woman, when they had entered the cot, “ I bring one to you whom I would have treated better than myself ; whom it may be concerns you not, suffice it that she is worthy of all thou canst do to entertain her ; see that thou dost it. When the first gray streak of the morning's light creeps over yon mountain pinnacle I shall return ; until then, Tecalco, farewell.”

And before the emperor's daughter could make an answer, the figure of Malmiztic had vanished out of the narrow doorway, leaving Tecalco, with Cola and the dwarf. He was soon on the lake in his swift black boat, skimming over the water like a whippoorwill through the shadows of twilight. He landed his craft upon the bank of a canal, among a hundred boats of fishermen

and watermen, and boldly ventured into the heart of the great city, but so muffled in his dark mantle that no one could discover who he was. He made his way, without hesitation, through the many wanderers who strolled about in the soft, sweet night air, and was soon lost in their midst.

Cola now led Tecalco to a corner of the hut, where she pointed to a small ring in the floor; the dwarf stooped, and by it lifted up a trap door, and they all three descended a dark flight of stairs whose length seemed almost interminable; and far down in this almost fathomless depth, they came to a broad, flat landing, flagged with immense slabs of marble, and from a hollow cavity in the earth a stream of gas shot upward and burned with a brilliant and beautiful light. The dwarf now drew from a sack a pair of silver lamps, and touched them to the flame, and they passed through a vast hollow crypt, which had been seared and parched with fire; and still father on, their walk lay through masses of lava and ashes; huge stones, burnt white as lime, were scattered around, and now and then a fallen pillar could be seen lying in their way, red and dusky, like a shaft of rusting iron. After passing through an immense arched tunnel, they emerged upon an open street of a subterranean city; here, in the darkness, their lamps revealed tall trees standing upright, limbless, black, and charred, like rows of gigantic soldiers, their roots twisting among and lifting the stones of the pavements, and palaces, temples, and deserted dwellings, which seemed too desolate for the habitation of even a gnome or a spectre. Decay alone appeared to sit in those huge, hollow halls, and silently watched the wrecks as they mouldered into dust.

The party pursued their way through the buried ruins of this splendid city, traversing street after street, whose solitude and silence were unbroken, save by the sound of their voices and the hollow ringing of their footsteps upon the polished pavement of solid stone, while high on either hand vast piles and superstructures arose, grey with age, and gloomy with shadows, as they stood in their huge grandeur and magnificence as silent as sepulchres. Now, at the foot of a giant flight of steps, which led up to the shattered front of a massive temple, stood a monster statue in marble.

"This," said Cola, to Tecalco, "is the last of the kings of Tula, the concluding link of the Toltec kings, the only living branch of whom is the mighty Malmiztic. Let us advance deeper into this mysterious abode of the dead, and I will tell something of its history."

They pursued their way in silence, and as they penetrated the wide and gloomy streets; the heart of Tecalco trembled with fear and awe. Now, upon each hand, stood statues in every direction, some perfect and beautiful, while others were hideous, deformed, and defaced; many were broken and unsightly; thousands lay in fragments, scattered in the streets and court-yards, and infinite were the number which strewed the earth and mingled with the dust and red ashes which encrusted the ground.—Mutilated semblances of the human form and face were everywhere visible in this ruined city of the dead; they alone were the only types of humanity which tenanted this sarcophagus of a long-lost race. Giant piles and massive masonry still stood in gloomy grandeur in their great grave, which had not seen for years one beam of day's celestial radiance, for all was one dark ruin. The light of the lamps grew grey as it glimmered upon the black turrets of tall towers, or crept through the cracks and fissures of mighty palaces whose halls were dumb and tenantless. Throughout this vast domain of darkness, not one sighing breeze was heard to murmur through its hollow labyrinths; no gust whistled fitfully through these unhaunted castles. There was not a spider's web, nor a breath to wave it had there been one; all was dry, noiseless, dark, and dead; there was not a cricket or a death-watch heard; the vast city slept, a moveless, unlighted mass of dull decay.

Infinite were the windings which the party took through the desolate streets, while the hollow echoes of their footsteps rang strangely on the ear as they passed the deserted tenements, temples, and palaces, and probed their way into that city of darkness and region of night, where along their way dim outlines indistinctly shadowed forth the forms of majestic castles, which loomed up in the vague uncertain vault of vacancy, where not a star pierced the gloom; but doubtful objects grew huge in their

proportions as suggestive shadows would give the mind a clue whereby to grasp some greater thing beyond.

And thus they wandered on, the mind of Tecalco being lost in the stupendous grandeur and unearthly gloom which pervaded this dread and awful scene of speechless sublimity and death. At length, after having made the circuit of the city, they entered one of the palaces near the spot where they had first descended into this shadowy realm. Here a sight burst upon her vision, which made the gorgeous halls of her father, Montezuma, seem naked and poor. The floor of the magnificent chamber which they entered was of many-colored marbles, in mosaic work, and these were flowered by hundreds of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and other gems which were set in the masses of marble with the most delicate and exquisite workmanship, and arranged in the most beautiful forms, figures, and shapes which imagination could invent; around the spacious apartment were hung upon the walls pictures of wondrous beauty and brilliancy, whose design, execution, and coloring were of surpassing merit; they were set in frames of solid gold, and ornamented upon the margin by a border of jewels; upon the ceiling were groups of exquisitely painted figures, and scenes portraying an ideal paradise, while all around the apartment stood statues of the most inimitable sculpturing, representing almost every actual or imaginary form of beauty, while in all parts of the great chamber, in niches, upon pedestals, and even ranged upon the floors, were vases and urns of the rarest carving, most elegant proportion, and brilliant colors, from a snowy, transparent alabaster, to bright dyes of gold and azure, and stains of deepest crimson.

Cola seated herself in one of the apartments upon a massive and luxurious lounge, and her two companions followed her example; it was a beautiful room, filled with tall columns of alabaster and marble, which were wrought in admirable devices of sculpture; the ceiling overhead was a dark-blue dome, with a moon of gold standing out in full relief; a mummy stood in a crystal case, in each of the four corners of the chamber. The dwarf lighted a number of lamps which were standing in various places, and Cola proceeded to give Tecalco the traditionary history of this subterranean city, which she had learned from the

Toltec, and the hieroglyphics which he had taught her, a part of which ran thus :

“ The race who once peopled these ruins, worshipped a single God, an invisible and all-powerful divinity, and they grew in numbers and prosperity until there was no nation like unto them for wisdom, plenty, power, and magnificence ; after a time, their learning, which had been most cherished, grew to be neglected, and the people became ignorant and forgot the great maxims upon which their simple and excellent government was based, which were, love and obey God, and learn to make others happy. But these plain precepts fell into disuse, and they made themselves a king and set him over them ; the king grew proud of his power and oppressed the people, especially the poor, whom he taxed heavily for the support of his magnificent state, and his retinue grew so great that wide lands were necessary for their support, and numberless slaves for their attendance ; and these parasites did so persuade the king of his greatness and his glory, that he caused many thousands of workmen to leave the support of their needy families, and to engage in erecting a great and mighty image, a monument of his majesty ; and when the evening of its completion came about, the unnumbered multitude went forth at the red hour of sunset, to worship and adore it, and they bowed down before it, and decked its huge pedestal with wreaths of beautifully-painted flowers. That night the tempest of the tropics came forth, with darkness and lightning, and the heavy booming thunders came rolling through the mountain pinnacles, and burst upon the head of the gigantic mockery of power, and the chains of lightning ran in red and liquid links around the spire of its cloud-piercing shaft, and darted down its monstrous column to the earth ; and the multitude ran forth, but stood appalled with awe at the spectacle, for another bolt fell with a startling crash, which shook the region around, and the crimson dart struck the pillar of pride, which, reeling upon its site, was precipitated to the earth, a huge and shattered wreck, over which the wild lightnings played and danced like a sporting troop of fire spirits. And now, the flood-gates of the skies were opened, and as they were drawn back, the winds went forth, and a roaring torrent plunged down from heaven and swept the great

shaft into the river's bed, and inundation ran riot through the city's streets.

"The night storm passed, and with the sunshine they began a like monument to their king; the sun blazed upon the earth; night came, but no drop of dew fell. Thus day succeeded darkness, but the great round sun rose red and angry, and shot his fiery beams upon the parching ground; flowers withered, and the green grass grew brown; great trees dropped their leaves, and their tender twigs became sapless; the fountains of the earth failed, and the brooks dried up.

"Morning after morning, the sun came up like a globe on fire, and went down at nightfall in a dusky crimson drapery; the ground cracked open, and the dry dust beneath their feet was hot and fiery; but no cloud came with rain—one vast curtain hung upon the sky by day, and a shroud of darkness by night; the river sank in its muddy bed, and the mud baked with heat; every green thing was gone; dust was upon everything, and the fruitless fields were crusted and cracked; thousands were burning up with thirst, and children ran crying and clamoring about the streets for water; old men begged upon their knees for only one more draught, and then agreed to die; pounds of precious metals and jewels were paid for a single cup of muddy slime; the people scattered over the lands in search of water, but there was none; and even the great cisterns of the king were getting low and foul, and the workmen dropped down with their tongues sticking fast in their dry throats, as they labored upon the building of the great image.

"At last a holy hermit came forth from his cave in mount Popocatepetl, and his hair and long flowing beard were as blanched as the white mantle of the mountain; and he came with his staff in hand fearlessly before the mighty king, and spake boldly, saying:

"Thou mortal worm! have done with this vanity, and let yon half-formed spectre of pride, that ghost which has made the faces of this people pale, let it remain unfinished."

"And the hoary pilgrim turned upon his staff and departed, without even looking to take leave of the great king; but a thousand fell upon their knees before the throne, and besought the

monarch to have pity upon his people, and command the work to cease; and the monarch was moved, and accordingly he bade the builders stop. Suddenly soft showers descended upon the dried dust, and the thirsting thousands had plenty and pleasure.

“But, after a time, the heart of the king again began to swell with pride, and he completed the giant statue, and then he collected a thousand gaily-dressed courtiers, who sat in his mighty palace hall, feasting and reveling, until they were wild with wine, when they all arose, and calling their king a god; they crowned him with garlands of the most exquisite flowers, and danced around him, singing loud songs in his praise. In the midst of these insane orgies, a spectre child, with a putrid head, arose, and, lo! it was the phantom figure of the Plague! it mortified and melted where it stood, but heart-sickness seized upon the whole host, and death commenced darting in every direction through the hall, and laid his cold hand upon the hearts of the guests, and at that skeleton touch the life blood froze in their bosoms, and their limbs were struck powerless by paralysis. Death flew from house to house, and left a green spot upon the walls, and the tenants sickened and died, until the city was one vast lazaret-house; the husband flew from his wife, the brother from his sister, the mother from her suckling infant; contagion lurked in every touch; it filled the atmosphere; all food was tainted, and the water poisoned by it, and the living dropped dead in their houses, and the streets were filled with decaying masses of mortality; wild beasts fed upon the bodies, and they died instantly; corpses lay thick throughout the city, and all around the region likewise, where the pestilence left no one of the population. Men moved by each other as silent as shadows, and pale as ashes, passed on without a glance; the living would neither bury nor burn the dead; they fell like forest trees, and so they lay and rotted, until the city was one vast bed of carrion and corruption. But yet the king held his horrid revels in his palace. At length the holy hermit of Popocatepetl, with his milk-white beard, came, staff in hand, again before the throne, and cried:

““Oh, mortal worm! why wilt thou fly in heaven’s face? Hurl down yon aspiring shaft, from whose impious pinnacle death’s

warriors let fly their darts, and transfix a human heart with every arrow. Ay! lay yon spire low, and fly into the wilderness, and pray to the one and only true God!

“Perdition seize me, if I move a stone of its structure!” cried the king; ‘away with thee, thou white-bearded fool, or I will have thee scourged to death for thy presuming. I am a god myself, and hurl defiance at all other deities. Wine! Wine!’ cried the king, and his countenance grew red with rage.

“‘Poor worm!’ said the hermit, in hollow tones, as he passed out of the palace portal. On his way out of the city, he saw a youth upon his knees, who fervently prayed to the living and invisible God. ‘Come with me,’ said the hermit, and the youth rose from his knees, and followed him far off to his cave in Popocatepetl.

“That night, behold when the king was mad with wine, he rushed wildly forth into the streets, and gazing into the heavens, gnashed his teeth, and cursed the God who made him! while the sounds of riotous revelry echoed from his palace halls, where those who despaired of life laughed in the face of death! A bolt of lightning dropped blazing from the sky, and struck the sacrilegious monster full in the brow, and he fell down a burnt and blackened corpse! And at that instant the mountain hard by was rent from top to base, and through the vast, yawning chasm a river of fiery lava burst its bounds, and ran in one red body down the mountain side, and swift as the course of a charger at speed, it encircled the city, in one broad belt and river of liquid flame! Black ashes and monstrous stones came down thick as hail in a hurricane, and the people flew to the palaces for protection, but the genius of the earthquake shook the city and the proud structures crumbled and crushed them in the ruins. A moment more, and the wide plain rocked uneasily in its seat, and then sank down in one broad mass, deep in its hollow sepulchre, a city of the dead!

“The youth, who was the king’s son, whom the old hermit had taken to his cave, alone remained of the race; he, the wise sage instructed in all learning, lore of art, and holiness, keeping one God of truth and love ever before his eyes, and bidding him turn with loathing and horror from idolatry. The youth profited

by the precepts and lived until his own beard was as white as that of the holy hermit of Popocatepetl; and now, one marvel moreover, that youth was the grandsire of our mighty master, Malmiztic !”

Cola here finished her legendary history, and she, with Tecalco, and the dwarf, commenced ascending the great stairway which led to the outer world. After a long and weary ascent, in which Tecalco was entirely exhausted with toil, they came at length to the face of the earth in the cottage, and they opened the door and looked forth, and it was broad daylight ! and there stood Malmiztic, with his arms majestically folded, in the glimpses of the morning, while the sun shot from his shield of gold, arrows of light against the grey mantle of the dawn.

CHAPTER XI.

CORTES now left Tlascala, and bent his way towards Cholula, accompanied by his old allies, the Chempoallese, and an immense host of the newly conquered Tlascalans. When they arrived near the city, they pitched their tents in the fields upon the outskirts of the town, the inhabitants having protested against the entry of the Tlascalans; but notwithstanding their show of apparent friendship, Cortes distrusted their sincerity, and time proved that his suspicions were not groundless, for Montezuma had secretly sent his priests and emissaries into the city, with orders to persuade the people to manifest no hostile intent, but to lull the Spaniards into fancied security, and when opportunity presented itself, to fall upon them, and spare neither the Christians nor their confederates. The intercourse between the camp and the city was, outwardly, of the most amicable character, constant exchanges being made of provisions and wares, for glass and gewgaws, and the Cholulans penetrated into all parts of the camp, fearlessly and without interruption, at the same time observing, as spies, all the power and appointments of the Christians and their allies.

At night, an ancient Indian woman, of high rank, came into the camp in search of Marina, for whom she had formed a striking attachment. Having entered her tent, she drew Marina into an obscure corner, and secretly whispered into her ear that there was a stratagem on foot to destroy them all, from which destruction she wished to preserve Marina; that even now the streets were undermined, to entrap the horses, and deep pits were dug in all directions, filled with sharp spikes and stakes, covered over so carefully and ingeniously, that the most cautious eye could not suspect the jeopardy, until they rushed upon it, and were impaled.

The faithful Marina covertly conveyed this intelligence to Cortes, who instantly ordered the woman to be seized, and she confessed the whole plot. He then sent secretly for the Mexican priests, who were in the city, and after they had presented themselves, he laid before them his knowledge of the stratagem, at the same time totally exculpated them from blame, desiring them to return to their master, Montezuma, as he intended to punish the Cholulans for their perfidy. The priests were petrified with astonishment at the discovery, which appeared to them no less than a work of magic, and were only too glad to escape with their lives, and they hastily departed for the city of Mexico.

In the morning the place was found to be strongly fortified and prepared for the most powerful defence. Terms of capitulation were offered them by Cortes, when he entered the town, but the answer which he received was a shower of stones and darts, which were hurled upon him and his followers from the roofs and terraces of the houses, which were chiefly built of solid stone. This so enraged Cortes that he commenced an attack upon them whose fierceness has no parallel in history ; his allies rushed upon those in the streets, and after a sharp contest compelled them to fly ; and time and again they formed in battle array, but were forced to fall back from the impetuous attack of the assailants, who slew the Cholulans until the pavements of the ancient city blushed with the blood of slaughter ; and Cortes, forgetting the high and honorable maxims of chivalry, burst into the dwellings, and with his followers cut down the foe as they fled, screaming for their lives.

The great guns began their battery upon the walls of the time-honored buildings, and they were made one scene of wreck and ruin. Over the great grey piles of stone rolled the dark volume of the sulphurous smoke, and the hoarse thunders of the deep-mouthed cannon shook the foundations of the antique fabrics, and startled the hearts of the terrified defendants of the city.

Remorse was forgotten by both the Christians and their confederates, and frightful massacre followed. Nor could Cortes check the frightful tide of murder which he had opened upon the enemy ; the action had heated the blood of the assaulting parties, and pity appeared to have forsaken their hearts, and they

mounted upon the flat roofs and hewed down their defenders, and drenched the house-tops with puddles of human gore ; but the Cholulans still kept up the conflict furiously, fighting with a desperation which a certainty of death alone can draw forth ; but their efforts were useless, for despite their momentary repulse of an assault, the adversaries would return with undiminished vigor.

Thus all day long this terrible work of destruction and slaughter progressed, with an energy and ferocity that knew no faltering. During the continuance of the terrific conflict, many had cried for mercy and quarter, but their shrieks were unheeded, and the miserable, helpless creatures perished by the sword, spear, and maquahuitl, while their opponents rushed on over their corpses, like a hungry troop of fiends, eager to glut their appetites by blood.

Day and night passed, and the battle continued long after the besieged had prayed for a parley, but no cessation of hostilities occurred until all opposition had entirely ceased, and the besiegers were weary of sacrificing and mutilating their victims.

Cortes now marched on towards the capital. Upon one hand, Montezuma had lined the way with troops to attack and surprise him ; and upon the other route, he had filled the narrow mountain passes with huge fragments of rock, and felled masses of giant forest trees across the road to obstruct the passage of the troops and artillery, with parties in ambuscade to harass him upon all sides ; but Cortes immediately set his Tlascalan troops to work and cleared the way in defiance of all opposition and marched on to Mexico.

News of the shocking massacre, at Cholula, was not long in reaching the ears of Montezuma, and startling his soul upon its seat. He convened his council straightway, and debated again, for the last time, the question of what course should be pursued toward the Spaniards and their associates. Cuitlahua, Guatemozin, and Cacama advocated resistance, as the only policy, with a most ardent and determined zeal ; they deemed it rash and dangerous to allow an enemy to come to their capital, and thus obtain a knowledge of their power and resources, and urged the imperious necessity of an immediate and general attack upon the

foe. But an opposite party deprecated such a course to the last degree, as lacking all prudence and discretion, and in this they were supported by Cuicuitca and Coanaco, who urged upon the assembly the project of sending their brother Cacama to intercede with Ixtliloxchitl, who had gone over, with his rebel forces, and joined Cortes, at Tlascala. This, which was a scheme for Cuicuitca to obtain the throne of Tezcuco, seemed so plausible a proceeding that it won the opinion of a majority of the council assembled, and, among the rest, of Montezuma himself, who concluded to adopt the policy with certain modifications, which were, first, to deny their entrance, and then attempt to purchase their departure, by presents, to dissuade them from their determination; and upon failure of these to admit them to the city upon terms of hospitality; and, accordingly, notwithstanding the determined opposition, upon the part of Cacama, to such a course, he was dispatched by Montezuma to Cortes, with superb offerings, such as the finest mantles, embroidered with the rarest and most precious jewels, heaps of gems, and a vast sun or wheel of solid, glittering gold, whose value was far beyond all the masses of that metal which the Christians had ever beheld in Europe; but this immense treasure, instead of satisfying their desire of cupidity, only excited their inordinate passion of avarice, and this wealth, which would have been more than sufficient for them forever, was only an incentive to the accumulation of still more. And thus Cacama and his deputies returned to the city, without having accomplished the object of their mission, and the Spaniards came on to the verge of the mountain wall which surrounded the sweet valley of the lakes.

It was a sight which, in a moment, repaid all the toil of the cavaliers for their long and weary marches over moor and mountain, their hunger and thirst, their labor and fatigue, battle, bloodshed, and suffering, all, all was repaid in this one glance. It was a view of Eden opened at their feet; sunny sheets of silver water were spread out in the vale, and lay like mighty shining mirrors, in which tall mountains gazed at their own images, and giant pines bowed to their shadows in the blue depths below; and there, like a diamond in a setting of silver, in the midst of the lake, the magnificent metropolis stood, with a thousand spires

flashing in the sun—and this was Mexico! the mark and goal of their desperate and daring adventure. This one view rewarded the labor of a lifetime, for earth had not upon its surface another spot of such transcendent and majestic beauty; here were cities, floods, forests, plains, rocks, rivers, and mountains, at a glance! the whole glowing in a light like a vision of enchantment. From this crowning height they descended into the valley, and pursued their way along the plain in the direction of the great city of the Aztecs.*

* * * * *

It was midnight, and the monarch, Montezuma, was musing in his chamber alone. He was in no mood for company, but sought quietude, that he might have contemplation upon the various objects of his public and private business.

It was an hour of unbroken stillness and solemnity; the pale moon peeped in at his latticed windows, by which a guard was ever and anon pacing back and forth, keeping his sentinel watch; and, within the apartment, the tall torches were burning low, and their red light flickered in shadows over the walls and the royal tapestried couch, as the night breeze swept gently through the slats of the lattice, cool and refreshing, to the monarch as he sat with his eyes fixed upon the elegantly-ornamented walls, where paintings and rich draperies were hung in tasteful array, and the mind of the monarch wandered from its constant theme of the coming Christians and their companions, to the loss of his daughter, Tecalco; and as he pondered upon this subject, his thought fell upon the poor jailor, who had returned that day, at nightfall, after a fruitless search for the prisoner, and who was to suffer sacrifice in the morning to release his wife and children at the hands of the priests.

“By the gleams of the white moonshine,” said the emperor, aloud, but to himself, musingly, “I would not have lost that man Malmiztic, in such a time as this, for a score of Tlascalan giants; nor my daughter, for all the jailors’ hearts under heaven. After all, the Toltec was right, for the giant had made a fair defence; but then, the proud mystic bearded me before the mob—but how

* “When I beheld the scenes which were around me, I thought within myself that this was the garden of the world.”—BERNAL DIAZ.

deadly was his sword, and how feeble were dungeons and chains to control his power—but, since I can neither have him, nor my daughter, I will make the villain, who guarded him, pay the penalty by the direst torture which the cunning of the priests can invent.”

At this, the emperor made a vehement gesture with his right arm, when his ear caught a sound, and turning his eye he beheld a black figure emerging from the arras; his first impulse was to cry for the guard, but at that moment his glance met the black eyes of Malmiztic. The moonlight, as he advanced, fell upon that flashing and terrible sword of unknown metal; seeing it bare in the hand of the figure, the emperor restrained and withheld his voice, and shrank, trembling and terrified, upon the floor.

“Arise, Montezuma!” said Malmiztic, for it was he, “mistake me not for a midnight murderer; mine is not the assassin’s calling.”

“What would you, then, with me?” said the emperor, with agitation.

“I hear,” replied the other, “a common rumor in the streets, that to-morrow you sacrifice the poor but honest man, to whom you lately entrusted me. It was no fault of his that I escaped, and I am here to demand of you, as a man, his release.”

“Dread being!” said the emperor, not yet having recovered his self-possession, “I seek not now your life.”

“Nay,” said the Toltec, “but I come not to speak of myself, nor with fear to force you to forgive this humble jailor. I crave of you, Montezuma, as a favor, that you will set this victim at liberty, for his offence is not of his own fault, but by a power over which he could have had no influence. In a word, then, shall he go free?”

The bold Toltec spake this in such a resolute and determined tone, that the monarch hesitated not to answer:

“He shall, Malmiztic; but let me ask if thou hast murdered my daughter, to avenge the wrongs which I have done thee?”

“Why, what dost thou take me for?” said the Toltec. “Montezuma, I am fierce when driven to despair, but I bear no malice in my heart; I bury the errors of the hour whenever they have passed, and never call them into being more.”

“Then, she is alive!” said the king, rising from his knees, and clasping his hands fervently, “and thou wilt restore her to a fond father’s arms, the peerless flower of my heart’s garden!”

“Ay, Montezuma,” answered the other, “she shall return to thee, as pure, uninjured, and undefiled as the moment when she fled from your roof, to visit the hidden mansion of him who now stands before you; and as you bear a father’s love to your child, think upon the bliss which you will bestow, when by a word you can give back this poor jailor to the bosom of his wife, and the caresses of his harmless babes.”

“I swear it, Malmiztic,” said the monarch, “by the shadow of the sun upon the dial, that not an hour shall go by the dawn, until that captive shall pass free from his prison.”

“If so,” said the other, in answer, “another day shall not rise thereafter, until thy daughter is restored to thee—farewell.”

“But, stay!” said the king; “Malmiztic, I have done you wrong; canst thou forgive me, even as I have pardoned thee? Return, and be once more my friend, and let all be forgotten.”

“My liege,” said the stately Toltec, bowing his broad head, “I bury the past in the shadows of its own darkness.”

So saying, he passed out of the palace, as silently as he had entered, and disappeared in the dim and doubtful light of the grey-robed dawn.

In the morning, Montezuma commanded, to the astonishment of all, that the jailor be released. The priests raged; the people were delighted, for the jailor was a good man, and beloved by many; and when his wife and children were brought forth, and he clasped her to his bosom, and his children clung to his knees, the mob were melted to tears, and shouted:

“Long live Montezuma! our good, forgiving king!”

But soon the news came that the Christians were at hand in the valley hard by, and now marched towards the city; and the manner in which the monarch now went forth to meet Cortes, is thus told by an ancient writer:*

“He appeared with a most numerous and noble attendance; three nobles preceded, each holding in his hand a golden rod as

* Clavigero.

the insignia of majesty, by which the people were advertised of the presence of their sovereign. Montezuma came, richly clad, in a litter covered with plates of gold, which four nobles bore on their shoulders, under the shade of a parasol of green feathers, embroidered with fancy works of gold; he wore, hanging from his shoulders, a mantle adorned with the richest jewels of gold and precious stones; on his head, a thin crown of the same metal, and upon his feet, shoes of gold, tied with strings of leather worked with gold and gems."

Thus he proceeded out upon the peninsula, which separated lake Tezcuco from Chalco. After having crossed the great causeway which led through the lake from the capital, he was met by the Christian cavaliers and their commander, Cortes, who advanced with a bold air, and was upon the eve of embracing the majestic monarch, when his attendants, horrified at such familiarity being taken with their sovereign, hastily interfered and prevented the unpardonable sacrilege. After this interruption, the interview proceeded with diplomatic gravity, and, through the medium of Marina, the Indian interpreter, Cortes communicated the intelligence that he had been sent by his sovereign, the great emperor of the east, to bear messages of greeting to Montezuma, the mighty monarch of the west. Here-upon the latter offered rich presents to this royal messenger from the Orient, and indicated a desire for his departure; but the self-constituted ambassador of the king of Spain was too well versed in the history of Machiavelli to obey this hint, and therefore most respectfully declined to return, stating that his monarch and master would not deem that he had discharged properly the duties of his office, unless he had visited and spent some time in the mighty metropolis of the western world.

Finding that Cortes would not be overruled in his determination, the emperor proceeded to escort him into the city, and the entry was one of great martial magnificence. The gorgeous standard of Castile, and all the armorial blazonry of the Christians, were displayed, and nothing which could add to the pomp and splendor of the entry was neglected. The bright lances flashed and sparkled in the sun, and the stirring notes of the trumpet brayed thrillingly through the valley, as the horsemen and

infantry of the Spaniards led the way, followed by their artillery, whose hoarse thunders saluted the city at their approach, while the bursts of smoke faded over the blue bosom of the lake.— Behind them succeeded the long lines of Totonaca and Tlascalan allies, upon whom the hosts which came out to meet the Christians, cast deadly glances of hatred.

They all crossed the causeway; and that night the daring Cortes and his invincible companions, were placed in the ancient palace of King Axajacatl, in the midst of the city of Mexico, and the heart of the Aztec empire!

CHAPTER XII.

MONTENZUMA held his council secretly in his palace, to learn the disposition of the various sages and nobles of the realm ; among the first who arose was the wily Cuicuitca ; he addressed the assembled body thus :

“ Most royal sovereign and sapient counsellors : it is with diffidence that I arise in your august presence, to give utterance to the views which I entertain, as to the proper policy of our king and government towards the strangers who are now our guests in this city. If there is one evil among men, more dreadful than all the rest, that evil is war ; it is a disaster, which has a train of trouble following in its footsteps ; it is a blow, like an axe stricken in the tree of our government, time may heal it over, but the wound cankers the core. When our king conquered the various realms around, it was to chastise the marauder, and to protect the peaceful against the power of force, fraud, rapine, and violence ; but now, the necessity no longer exists, the various tribes have ceased their feuds, and the kingdom should be permitted to settle firmly upon its foundation.”

“ Sages,” said Montezuma, “ our cousin, Cuicuitca, says well ; this is no time to brew a dissension at home, with our tributaries, or with this embassy of the great emperor of the east. We have heard fearful news of these men, but we find them peaceful people, courteous and complaisant, bold in their bearing, and honest in their action ; their intent cannot be hostile, or if it were, their power is too limited to injure us, while they must be irresistibly overwhelmed should they be mad enough to attempt anything offensive. Their purpose, I am persuaded, is an idle curiosity to see the wonders of our land, to bear the news back to their monarch, and when the novelty of the thing has passed, they will quietly return to the lands from whence they came. How

can we say that these are not the men of destiny, of whom our prophets and oracles have so frequently spoken? Wherever they have fought on their way to our capital, fortune has invariably followed their banner; and the strange monsters, which fly over the fields with them upon their backs, prove that they are something more than mere men; and again, their terrific implements of warfare, which not only sweep down ranks of soldiers, like autumn leaves, but burst through the most substantial walls of stone, would render a contest with them not only rash but futile. I, therefore, reverend sages and learned counsellors, submit it, as my firm, settled conviction, that this is no time to make a breach of peace, and open hostilities against an unoffending and dangerous people."

Cacama now arose, when the monarch had ceased, and, throwing his bright eyes around over the assemblage, began thus:

"Our most royal king and sapient sirs: it may be that I am too bold to come fresh upon the footsteps of majesty, and ready to attack the position he has taken, and push his tower of reason from its foundation; but my sense of duty to my king, my country, and my conscience, forbids me to stand silent, while I feel that a course is about to be pursued, which will be as puerile in our soldiership as it will be pernicious to our policy. Why should we parley for peace, or crave favor from those who are the fast friends of our enemies, the Tlascalans? Saving your presence and opinion to the contrary, my honored sovereign, I hold him no wise counsellor, who says, let the stranger have a home in our midst. Have we not rebellious spirits in the very heart of our country, as is plainly proven by the course of our brother, Ixtliloxchitl, and his confederates? Grave sirs, I hold it far from prudent to harbor these men and their villanous allies, even for a day. If their designs are honest, why need they hide them from us? But, instead of making their purposes plain, they disguise them under frivolous subterfuges; schemes so false and shallow, that we should be simply fools to be deceived by them."

Cacama took his seat, and the hum of voices was heard in the assembly, whispering and consulting; now, one could be seen energetically declaiming, in an earnest but subdued manner, and

significant nods and looks, which expressed as much as words, were interchanged among the members of the council. At length Coanoco, one of the Tezcucan princes, asked the ear of the assembly:

"Why!" said he, proudly, "should we feel disposed, we could crush these Christians at a blow; but it is better that we keep upon terms with them, and thereby we may entrap these knavish Tlascalans, and, in the end, gain more by stratagem than open war; and if the king of this Christian host should hear that we had treated his subjects severely, when they offered to act prudently and peacefully, it might chance to bring a war upon our hands, from a far more fearful power than this handful, who are here. The strange solicitude, exhibited by our brother Cacama, to drive them forth at once, argues that he fears this paltry handful of white faces, and the horde of black-hearted Tlascalans who follow them. At present, all is calm; and to raise a storm to burst upon our own heads, when all may be quietude and sunshine, were a work of the maddest folly; and this anticipation of evil, upon the part of our brother, is an over-wise piece of foresight, which would plunge a nation unnecessarily into a bloody war."

"With every deference let it be spoken, our brother and sovereign," said Cuitlahua, prince of Iztapalapan, to Montezuma, "I think this course is false. For, myself, I can see nothing in the action and character of the new comers, but a bloody march of conquest, and for a breathing space they come into our very midst, to mark our movements and refresh themselves, until they can begin anew the scenes which they have enacted from the coast to Cholula. What time is there to wait, and what should we wait for? That they may leave? Trust me, mighty monarch and grave counsellors, if they leave, it will be but to bring a new swarm of like blood-suckers upon our shores; and when the footing, which they have in the heart of this city, shall have become secure, then, mark me, insurrection will rock the Aztec empire to its very centre. Treason needs but little time for head, and this is a company from which no good can come; for, mark you, had they acted, as you bade, they should have turned them

whence they came, but lo! they bid defiance to your plain direction, and, in the face of thy mandate, camp in the heart of Tenochtitlan."

"Well, well," said the emperor, "we will let this matter rest for the present time."

"Saving you, sire," said Guatemozin, rising suddenly, "I say nay! Now is the time, or never, to decide! Why sit we here, shifting and vacillating in our seats and minds? To what end do we defer the day when this matter may be determined? Your counsellors say, let us wait in peace! that peace will be our bane; shall the bird look into the serpent's charming eye until it feels its fangs? I claim no foresight for myself, but I can see, without the diviner's art, a spark now kindling at the foundation of this empire; time is its fuel, and though the flame may not flash from the earth, nor the sound of the sword be heard, yet, like the fires which burn in the hidden caves, a vast furnace will be glowing, and the earthquake shock alone will give note of danger, while thy throne is sinking on its site. These men are stern and fearful warriors; the wild bursts of thunder and the red darts of lightning are in their hands; if they enter in our midst, they must command us all, in time; the strength of their mysterious minds must overmaster us, as their weapons will defeat ours. Plant here the banner of their cross, and let this be the temple of their God, and I will answer with my life, that the vengeance of our own Mexitli will descend from heaven upon us with a curse; we shall be blasted on the earth, in the green prime of our glory, for forgetting him, whose arm has been our strength in battle, and whose hand has scattered flowers of happiness over our smiling and sunny land. My lords, this is no time to dream; this will be a sleep from which this nation can never wake—a soft, delusive repose, creeping over our national faculties, which will gradually grow darker, until a terrible nightmare, which cannot be shaken off (like the folds of a fearful serpent), will paralyze our powers, and we shall struggle ineffectually in a convulsive death. Why, my sovereign and lords, should you nurse and cherish this monster, which will rise and desolate your homes? For me, if I can find but one man upon our green hills, who will stand by my side, I will swear that no foreign foeman,

come in what guise he may, shall ever, with my consent, set his rulers in the councils of my fathers, or plant his idols in the temple of their gods. Would ye see the dark-haired maidens of our vales and mountains loop their black locks with white flowers, to be the brides of strangers—strangers to our homes, our altars, and our hearts—fierce strangers, whose walk through the depth of the dark wilderness is marked by the stain of blood, and the grave of him who fell nobly fighting for the heirloom of his ancestry and the honor of his native land? Men, who are alien to our laws and sympathies, and who would subvert the purposes of our government, and annihilate the social order of the land; men, whose interest will be foreign to our own, and who have, as yet, shown nothing more clear in their characters than blood-thirstiness and avarice; whose hungry, famished eagerness would make us believe that gold was their only god, and that happiness and heaven were to be attained and purchased thereby? Whence, then, my lords, comes there a benefit in such men being here? Do they make us better men at heart? Do they add another star to the lights of our minds? Do they give us empire or wealth, learning or food, art for our improvement, or medicines for our ills? Do they open new treasures in the earth, or bring forth new corn and fruits from the ground? Is not our mountain air as pure without their sulphurous smoke? Have we not wars enough among ourselves, and implements of death for battle-fields? Out, then! I say, upon the policy, whose tame inactivity compels us to cringe, and with submission sanction an invasion which justice calls upon us so loudly to repel. I swear, by the dread power that rules us all, that I would rather have the pale lilies of the valley weeping upon my grave, than to hear that Mexico was a dependency upon a foreign power, or that my sovereign should be the slave or subject of any unknown emperor.”

When Guatemozin ceased speaking, his fine figure was drawn up to its full height, and the extraordinary beauty of his face, naturally, was increased, until it glowed with a seraphic majesty, blent with such delicate and rapid flashes of intellect, that even those who were most opposed to his sentiments could not withhold their admiration of this magnificent embodiment of intel-

lectual and physical beauty. But the brow of the monarch darkened more than it had ever been seen to do in a public assembly, upon even the most exciting occasions. He rose trembling with wrath and confusion; the irresistible eloquence of the other contrasted strangely with the disconnected and vehement style of Montezuma; his face flushed, and his voice quivered, as he proceeded to depict the error of involving the land in an unnecessary war with a people whose powers were terrible and not fully comprehended.

At the conclusion of the monarch's speech he poured his full flood of denunciation upon the head of Guatemozin, upbraiding him, as a rash, impetuous, hair-brained boy, to follow whose dictates would inevitably plunge them into a difficulty, in which they might be irretrievably lost. He then rated Cacama as being hasty and imprudent, and reproached Cuitlahua, as having lost his usual judgment and discretion; he expressed his determined resolution, to maintain, at all hazard, a pacific intercourse with Cortes and his companions.

Guatemozin dropped his head upon his hand and sat in silence. Cuitlahua gave a derisive laugh and turned aside, while Cacama gathered his graceful cloak proudly around him, and, with a stern scowl upon his brow, stalked majestically out of the room.

Montezuma then dissolved the assembly; but the speech of Guatemozin had rendered the course of the emperor very objectionable to many members of the council, and a discontented spirit was carried to the heart of the great city.

Through the whole capital it was the sole subject of popular discussion; some sided with the emperor, and held that it was better to make friends than foes; besides his name was a tower of strength, and there was that awe, which always clothed the person of Aztec monarchs, that still wielded a powerful influence with the mass of the people; but, nevertheless, others, excited by their hatred against the Tlascalans, and jealous of having these strangers encamped in the castle of Axajacatl, the ancient home of their kings, were violent in their denunciations of his quiet course of proceeding, with a body of men whom they deemed nothing more than spies.

After the council was dissolved, Montezuma sought Cuitlahua,

and used every inducement to bring him over to his policy ; but it was unavailing, the stern warrior was immovable ; his argument was the battle-shout and the flash of the maquahuitl, and his scheme, to seize the Christians and immolate them, in one body, upon the pinnacle of the Teocallis.

"Blood and death !" cried he, "dost thou think, Montezuma, that I, thy brother, would quail to do this ? Give me thy government, and before the horns of the moon shall look thrice over yon mountain height, there shall not be a stranger foot pressing the pavement of Tenochtitlan. But I am no man of words ; do what you will, Cuitlahua shall never have it upon his tomb that that he gave a foeman a foothold in the empire of his ancestors."

"Still, you will not hear me," said Montezuma, "I would spare the lives of my people. These men will not leave, save of their own accord ; provoke them to battle, and where will it end ? Allow them their own course, and they will soon grow weary of this place and leave us to ourselves."

"Dost thou think," answered the other, "that this submission to the ingress of strange gods will not provoke our own ?"

"Surely," said the monarch, "there must be wondrous power in those divinities whom these strangers serve, else how comes it that opposition seems of no avail against them ; numbers have not checked their progress, nor valor either, else had they never left the field alive, when Xicotencatl marched down upon them with the Tlascalan hosts. No, no, there is more might in their gods, Cuitlahua, than we dream of."

"Our gods against their gods !" said the prince of Iztapalapan ; "and our gods against the world ! When they desert us, it is time for us to die ; and if we desert them, I say, we are dastards and cowards, and do not deserve the grace and favor which they have shown to us from the hour when the great snow-white eagle, who led us from the north, perched on the nopal by the lake side, to this day, when our empire is extended to either ocean. Blood and death ! are we to suffer ourselves to be bound, hand and foot, without a blow ? I will plant myself by the standard of my country, and, come life or death, I will maintain its supremacy and honor, or perish in the attempt."

"Before you go farther, Cuitlahua," said the emperor, with a

resolute look, "you must hear me: I have used all the powers of persuasion, which are in my possession, to try to convince and persuade you to be guided by me, and follow my directions; these efforts have been unavailing, and now, mark me, I have promised my daughter Tecuiclipó's hand to you, and refused Guatemozín; but since you have determined to withdraw your support from me, I also withdraw my promise, and with it my daughter's hand."

"Nay, you will not do that!" said Cuitlahua, starting back.

"Yea, by the heart of Huitzilopochtli, will I!" said the emperor, firmly; "none but friend shall have my flesh and blood; and he that opposes me in principle, is as much my foe as my declared enemy. Gods of my forefathers! it seems to me that my powers are all upon the wane; my reason and authority weigh as the beard of a thistle, blown hither and thither by the popular breath; I have no voice to command, no judgment to dictate or direct, nor power to persuade. By the mansions of the sun! it is time that I roused myself, or being so much swayed by the will of others, I shall have no will of my own. Why do you thus thwart me? Would you have me kneel and pray to you to be persuaded? If you will be blind and perverse, go, go join Ixtliloxchitl, the rebels, the Otomies, the Tlascalans, if you like, raise what mutinies you will, without my city—sow what discords you like, but let it not be upon my fields; leave me and mine to peace; and if nothing will serve you but war, have your own course, and run riot in bloodshed; yea! 'till your whitest banner shall become crimson; but, mark you well, no daughter of mine shall ever follow the footsteps of mine enemy, and I hold him such who will now declare against keeping quietude with these strange and powerful Christians."

This speech surprised the prince of Iztapalapan, and alarmed him for fear of the loss of his intended bride; so, disguising his feelings and altering his tone of voice, he answered:

"Nay, Montezuma, you mistake me; I am no enemy, nor will I link myself in an alliance with any foe to Mexico. What I have asserted, was upon honest conviction; what I have offered, has been as advice; if you like not my measures, sanction them not, I can be neutral—I can stand aloof and let wiser heads than

mine direct the machinery of the government ; I know that my hand is worth more in the battle-field, than my head in the council-house. So, from this time forth, demand me when my country calls, and you will find no follower in your hosts more ready to obey your commands or support your throne."

"Then, be it so," said the monarch, "and if I find your action in keeping with your word, I will reward you, not as a subject, according to desert, but as a brother, whose merit has won a stronger hold upon the emperor's affections than the tie of natural love alone could give."

With this, they parted ; Cuitlahua to ponder upon and condemn his brother's course of conduct, and Montezuma to visit the bold Christian, who had so peacefully set himself down in a convulsed capital, as calmly as an albatross, who, perched upon an ocean rock, quietly watches the broad billows break in snowy surges all around her coral promontory.

CHAPTER XIII.

EARLY upon the following morning, Montezuma invited Cortes to accompany him in visiting the various objects of entertainment in and about the great city. The Christian general accepted the proposition ; so, taking with him a few of his most important officers and friends, among whom were Alvarado, Olid, and Sandoval, they set out to satisfy their curiosity. Palace after palace was entered, where all the refinements of the Aztec idea of civilization were abundantly exhibited. They made an ascent of the great temple, after having surveyed the vast wall by which it was surrounded, in which wall the priests had habitations or cells, like monks, and from whence they could be seen ascending and descending the broad flight of steps which surrounded the vast pyramid, upon whose summit Montezuma showed them the altar stone of sacrifice, and the sanctuary of the idol, and the priests, with their long black hair clotted with dry blood, and the smooth stone floor spotted with gory stains. At this sight the gorge of the Spaniards rose with disgust and horror, and at this point Cortes took occasion to preach a sermon from this pinnacle of paganism, wherein he attempted to persuade the monarch of the unnatural and unholy character of such worship, and at the same time, enlarging upon the purity and perfection of the Catholic faith ; to all of which Montezuma gave the most respectful and attentive hearing, but answered the Spanish general, by saying, that however excellent the gods of the Christians might be, and he doubted not they were most potent and wise deities, yet, as the gods of his fathers had ever been kind and just to his Aztec children, he would still place his hope and faith in them ; and with this he offered up a prayer for the sacrilegious words which had been uttered by the Spaniards, in this the very heart of his temple, and in sight of his own altar-stone.

From this the parties made their way around the city, and, after having witnessed many objects of beauty, splendor, and magnificence, they wended their way along the great causeway toward Chapultepec, where the monarch pointed out the huge work of masonry, whose tunnel bore through the salt lake the pure, sweet water from the distant hills, which furnished the capital a full supply at all seasons. At the foot of the hill of Chapultepec, they came upon the most beautiful and highly-cultivated gardens, which eye ever rested upon; trees, shrubs, plants, and flowers of the rarest and most exquisite varieties, gleamed in the soft, purple light of that November day; from intricate, vine-laced bowers, wild songsters delighted the ear of the Christians with melodies by them unheard before. Emerging from one of these thickets, at the foot of the knoll upon which they stood, was an artificial lake, with square sides, approachable by descending wide marble steps, whose base was washed by the rippling wavelets which were caused by the many silver fountains which came bursting forth in sparkling volumes from all sides of the hill, and tumbled over the stone steps in bright and scattered streams; low bushes of roses, and bright-blossomed plants, bent down and bathed themselves in the border of this pellucid pool, and over its surface sported the many-colored water fowl, which dipped in the shining waves for fish, or playfully fluttered after each other, shedding showers of silver from their rainbow-tinted wings and bodies, as they skimmed hither and thither over the bright surface.

By the side of this translucent lake, upon the polished steps which were kissed by the waters at his feet, sat a powerful figure, enveloped in the loose folds of a dark robe; he was gazing fixedly into the water, as if bent upon discovering something therein, or in a profound reverie.

"What form is that?" inquired Cortes, through the interpreter, of Montezuma.

"That," replied the monarch, "is one who is called Malmiztic, a mysterious man, whose learning is past penetration, and who maintains, and has done so for years, like yourselves, that there is but one God—a dangerous foe, I am led to think, for common fear seems a stranger to him; and yet, so mild is he

withal, that he walks around the weakest worm which crawls across his pathway. I will summon him to attend us."

Straightway the monarch dispatched a messenger to bid him come to them. Malmiztic was startled by the step of the person, but in an instant rose and approached them with a respectful air; he took his high flat hat from his large head, and bowed gravely to the emperor; upon the remainder he gave a transient glance, but his eye rested upon Cortes; it was the meeting of two high and haughty spirits; some sign of salutation passed between them, and the looks of scrutiny, which each bent upon the other, were fearless and penetrating—each recognized in the other a master mind.

The Toltec now accompanied them to examine the schools, the armories, the halls of justice, the grounds for public exercises and games, the emperor's vast workshops, and the places of tradesmen, artificers, and jewellers, a class whose skill won the admiration of the Spaniards, while the rich material, upon which they wrought, excited their cupidity. They pursued their way to the emperor's museum and the collection of wild animals. While they were wandering through this immense pile, the companions of Cortes, as well as himself, were struck with amazement at the monstrous beasts and frightful reptiles with which the place was filled, and stunned with the din and confusion of sounds which issued therefrom, while their many keepers proceeded to provide them with various kinds of food.

While they were here, a huge panther burst the wooden bars of his cage, and bounded towards Montezuma; the Christians drew their swords, and flew to places of safety, but the Toltec stepped before the monarch, and as he brought his bright blade forth, he fixed his piercing eyes with a fiery intensity upon those of the enraged animal, and the beast cowered away from him, as if struck with sudden blindness, and at last slunk into a dark corner, where it was captured.

This trifling incident was scarcely considered by the Spaniards, save in the way of admiration of the physical courage of the Toltec; but to the eye of the Aztec sovereign, there was something more than mere physical control—the mystic influence was the might of intellect, the sway of mind over mere existence. It

seemed, so powerful an effect could scarce have been the result of mere human agencies or the exercise of ordinary faculties ; and upon this the monarch mused as they wended their course towards the great pleasure palace of Montezuma ; it was a superb edifice, elegant in its architecture and magnificent in its design ; it was an octagon in figure, and from each facing a massive flight of marble steps led from the ground up to the broad doorways ; notwithstanding the stupendous scale upon which the giant structure was built, everything seemed in harmonious proportion. Long lawns, dotted with groups of native forest trees, stretched away towards the lake, and throughout these grounds strayed herds of deer and antelope, quietly cropping the rich herbage of the prolific soil. Around the great white building itself, were gardens, filled with medicinal plants and flowers, in such profusion and endless variety, that the Spaniards halted and gazed in mute astonishment at the surpassing beauty of the scene.

The Aztec emperor entered the edifice, and the party followed ; luxurious mats and lounges were immediately provided for them, and as soon as they were in a measure recovered from their exertion, they were conducted severally into elegant apartments, with walls of the most beautifully-veined and polished marble ; in the centre of these rooms, bright waters flowed into solid basins of snow-white stone, from whence they emerged, after refreshing ablutions, into a reception room of unheard-of richness in adornment ; and in this gorgeously-furnished chamber were a thousand female forms, radiant with beauty and decked in the most inimitably fascinating attire ; some were busy upon exquisite embroidery ; others weaving the brightest forms and figures from rich colored feathers ; some danced merrily after the wild music of the others, while laughter and conversation made the apartment ring again. But as soon as they beheld the monarch and his companions, they all rose, and saluted him, reverently, with charming grace.

The Christians were delighted ; this palace seemed a beautiful vision of enchantment ; the place was redolent with the odor of a thousand fragrant flowers, and a numberless multitude of singing birds, warbled forth an ever-varying combination of melodies. Splendid specimens of statuary were scattered throughout

the rooms, from the snowy alabaster to the beautiful red and black figures and vases of the clay of Cholula ; long, sweeping folds of the finest drapery and curtains ornamented the reed-latticed windows, or descended from the walls, half shielding the splendid paintings which decorated all the intervals or spaces between the pannels of the various doors ; upon the ceiling were many fanciful devices in fresco, wrought with great imagination in design, and extraordinary richness in tint ; but never had the eyes of the hardy adventurers beheld a thousand such faces and forms of beauty, as were now before them ; the tales of the Crusaders, telling of the harem of the Turk, faded before this host of dark-eyed damsels, and although the Circassian of the oriental seraglio might be likened to the purity of the snow-crowned Caucasus in complexion, yet the dark and dreamy eyes of the Aztec maids became the soft olive of their countenances, as fitly as do the silver stars which spangle with gleams of pale fire the soft and shadowy veil of the dimly-seen spirit of twilight.

Pre-eminent among that throng of bewitching faces, was one on which Cortes fixed his eyes with rapturous delight ; and, at the same moment, Alvarado caught a glance of the same beautiful creature, and exclaimed :

“By St. Iago ! I never saw, in Andalusia, a more seraphic being ! Pardon me, noble captain,” continued he to Cortes, “by your leave, I will learn from this heathen king who this fair houri is, whom he has captured and caged in this harem.”

“By our lady,” replied the commander, “you have my leave, and, I confess, I feel a trifle of interest in the same information.”

When Montezuma informed them that this was his own daughter, Tecalco, a change came over the countenances of several of the party at the same instant, from different emotions ; and the quick eye of Cortes caught, at a glance, a new and surprising alteration in the aspect of the Toltec, but he suppressed his natural curiosity, and pretended not to have noticed it.

The Cavaliers now advanced with the emperor, and were presented to the chief royal ladies of the realm, and Cortes extended his utmost courtesy to Tecalco, for, at the sight of her he became wildly enamored of her beauty, and these civilities were

returned by her with so much natural ease and gracefulness, that Sandoval swore by his beard, that the most elegant lady of Cadiz could not have been more at home in court etiquette than this beautiful daughter of the infidel king.

When Cortes returned to his quarters in the castle of Axajacatl, that night, his wife, in Cuba, was forgotten; his devoted and faithful interpreter, Marina, who had followed him from Tobasco near the coast, was forgotten—she, who had become more nearly attached to him every day, who had abandoned home, friends, relatives, and all, to follow the footsteps of the intrepid stranger, whose banner of the cross carried conquest before it, and whose brilliant sword was the talisman which attracted his companions close around him, and dazzled the countless hosts which opposed him, like the lightning's flashing glance.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHILE Montezuma was thus courteously entertaining the strangers in the great city, Guatemozin, Cacama, Cuitlahua, and Malmiztic, were far otherwise engaged; they held secret councils and conferences, where various policies were discussed, touching the welfare of the state; and the results of such meetings were seldom approbatory of Montezuma's course of action; complaints were made against this intrusion, but they were silent, and, although suppressed, the spark of fire thus dropped among combustible materials was quietly but rapidly spreading; the murmur of discontent was cautiously carried through the great mass who assembled in the metropolis and its environs, but especially in the city of Tezcucó, where the Spaniards were most obnoxious to the inhabitants; and these clamors increased daily, for the spirit of revolt was being rapidly disseminated, and its influence, if not apparently exhibited, was not unfelt. But within the city of Mexico, around the neighborhood of the royal palace, no word or act of discontent was heard or seen—so true is it that the ear of sovereignty is the last to catch the sound of rebellion—and the monarch does but sit upon the pinnacle of a political mountain, and the first indication which he has of his danger, is the mountain rocking upon its seat, and before he can recover from his surprise, his throne sinks upon its site, and his giant efforts to maintain his position as he goes down, are the ineffectual throes of a powerful and paralyzed Titan. Montezuma lacked not bravery; he had led the Aztec arms on to victory time and again. Many were the prodigies upon the field of fight which his single arm had achieved; but now, these energies, which had formerly been the spring to his action, had become inert, and he grew listlessly indifferent; nay, it seemed as if a lethargy had seized upon his faculties and deprived him of all spirit of resolution and

action. Not so with Cortes; he had now ripened in his own mind a scheme which, for daring, is almost without parallel, namely, to seize the Aztec emperor in the heart of his own territory!—Despair often leaps a gulf which cool reason would shudder to look upon. Cortes now conceived retreat would be fatal in the extreme, for various reasons: first, the Tlascalan allies would complain that too much lenity had been shown their ancient enemy; secondly, his own soldiers would complain that the fruits of their incredible toil and hardship were within reach, and to abandon them, at such a time, were to defeat the hope upon which they had lived; lastly, and most strongly, came the probability that if they attempted to return to Vera Cruz, Montezuma's host would surprise them on the way, and when deprived of the Tlascalans, the Christian camp must fall.

These doubts being weighed in the mind of Cortes, he resolved to hazard the experiment, and if it failed, to fight his way out as he best could; accordingly, within a week after his first entrance into the capital, he gave a dinner to which he invited the chief officers to meet the emperor. Montezuma came with all confidence, and participated in the festivity with unsuspecting freedom. It was in the palace of Axajacatl, in its great hall, that Cortes and his guests sat; the feast was protracted to an unusual length, and Cortes, under the pretext of retiring from the noise of the revel, invited the monarch into an adjoining apartment, where they might consult undisturbed. Montezuma entered and the door closed, separating him from his officers and attendants. No sooner were Cortes and he alone, with the interpreter, when such a change came over the countenance of the former that the emperor could scarcely repress his surprise.

"Montezuma," said the Spaniard, "why have you not discontinued those abominations in the sight of heaven, in your temples, against which I have so repeatedly spoken?"

"Because," replied the king, "it becomes me not to gainsay that which has come to me stamped with the seal of time and truth; it is not fit that I should grossly insult the wisdom of sages whose heads are hoary in the service of the gods; nor is it meet that I should violate the will of my faithful subjects, by

owning other gods than those who have cherished our nation since we first planted our huts amid the reeds of Tezcuco."

"I say," answered the other, sternly, "these things must and shall cease! Blood must cease to flow from your tower's top, or it must flow deeper in the streets. You, sir, have dealt doubly by me; at first, you proffered a willing ear, a conscience open to conviction, but Satan has hardened your heart until now I find you ready to violate the sacred rites of hospitality, and turn the wrath of your people against my allies, the Tlascalans; already the streets of Tezcuco are filled with rebellious spirits, and armed men are secreted in various palaces and temples, ready to burst forth in fury upon my comrades, when you shall give the watchword; gloomy sentinels have kept their spying eyes upon our every movement, and covertly measured our strength and resources."

"Nay," said Montezuma, "these are but my guards, who, in peace or in war, are ever thus upon the watch; it means no more than my ordinary guarantee of safety."

"Thou liest, infidel!" said the Spaniard, with intense fierceness, while he rose before the trembling monarch with extended arm; "thou liest! thou hast a plot on foot against me, and I have ferreted it out; and now, mark me, thou treacherous heathen! I will hold thee as surety for my people."

"Hold me!" cried the emperor, rising with astonishment and indignation, while he bent his dark bright eyes upon the Christian with incredulous scorn; "why, thou simple, pale-faced stranger, you know not my sacred character; shouldst thou attempt to detain the lord of the wild west, such countless legions would arise to rescue me, that the valley of the lakes would grow dark with their numbers; from the summit of Popocatepetl our angered gods would speak in thunder tones against the sacrilege."

"Ay!" said Cortes, clenching his teeth, "and if a legion of devils should leap from its fiery mouth, and yell for thee, they should not pluck thee from me! Let thy legions come on, and thy gods also, and you shall behold them swept away, as the fire sweeps the prairie; they shall be but as dry stubble when the red blaze is fanned by the wings of the wind. Oh! you proud

lord of these western wilds, I will teach thee to tamper with the credulity of a Christian cavalier. Misbelieving wretch ! couldst thou assemble as many warriors as there are waterfowl upon yon silver lake of Chalco, five hundred times their number could not save thee."

"Nay," cried Montezuma, "you mean not to murder me. I swear, by the powers which rule heaven and earth, I have meant thee no wrong since thou hast entered the precincts of Tenochtitlan."

"Dog !" cried Cortes, angrily, "dare not attempt to deceive me, for I can read the inmost thoughts of men, as if their bosoms were transparent."

"Then, as I live, I mean to act justly by thee ; I meditate no injury to thee or thine," said the king.

"Beware," said the Spaniard, "of falsehood, for, if I find thee guilty of duplicity, thou shalt not live to deceive me a second time. Wilt thou swear to offer no violence to my soldiery, raise no plot or intrigues, urge no secret conspiracies against my life or peace ?"

"Yea, by the sun and moon, by the holiness of Huitzilopotchli, and the life-blood of my heart, I swear !"

"Then," said Cortes, "dismiss thy followers—send it abroad that thou wilt spend a certain time in my quarters."

"Nay," interposed the monarch, "that may not be."

"Then, by Santiago !" cried Cortes, drawing his sword, "thou goest not hence alive !"

"How," answered the emperor, shrinking back from the burnished blade, "shall I not see my people !"

"Truly," said the other, "thou mayst see thy family, thy household, thy servants, and thy officers, but not thine enemies ; for they are thine enemies who would instigate thee to attack our Christian company. I mean thee well, barbarian, though thou hast not deserved it. Nothing shall be denied thee to maintain thy state ; thou shalt have all which thou wast wont to have, but for my own security upon thy action, thy dwelling must be in this palace ; it was fitted for thy fathers, thou sayest, and, therefore, it is not unfit for thee. All enjoyments and liberties I will give thee, but there shall be eyes upon thee constantly, and if

escape is attempted, in that hour thou diest ! Act honestly, and thou shalt live ; but dishonestly, and death with thee shall be inseparable ; and now, go with me and dismiss thy train, and see thou offerest no sign of discontent, or, by the Virgin ! thou shalt repent it bitterly. Let only such remain with thee as thy wants demand."

"Well, be it so," said the emperor, dropping his head, and following the haughty Spaniard into the great hall, where he addressed his retinue in this manner :

"My faithful servitors, saving such as attend upon my person, I now dispense with your presence. I have chosen to spend a short time in this castle, and in the company with this noble Christian and his comrades. Commend them, therefore, to your fellow citizens, and see that they lack nothing which is in your power to provide for their comfort and welfare."

The courtiers stood in silent amazement for a moment, and then departed, wondering at this strange movement upon the part of their monarch. Montezuma retired to the apartment prepared for him, and being alone, wept bitterly.

Cortes, upon cool reflection, was astonished at his own temerity, but he felt that he had undertaken a Herculean labor, and that it was now too late to shrink from the responsibility ; he therefore took the rounds of his quarters and spoke with Alvarado, De Olid, Sandoval, and all the principal persons of his army, personally making each one his special confidant, and flattering their vanities, by saying, to every one, that upon their judgment and support he relied for his success. So nicely did he blend their importance with his own, that scarce an individual could be found who did not approve of his course of conduct, nor was there one in the camp so bold as to condemn this high-handed stroke of policy, however much it might savor of a breach of faith and confidence.

Montezuma sent for Cortes to come to his new apartment, and accordingly he went, taking with him one or two of his most intimate officers, beside Sandoval and Alvarado. The emperor remonstrated strongly against this violent course which had been pursued towards him, and, in fact, waxed so warm, that Alvarado broke out impetuously, and exclaimed :

“Kill the heathen dog! By the Virgin, I will not hear this dark infidel inveigh against our holy church and her children! Has not the villain laid plots for our lives, lined the roadsides with swarms of savages, denied us his territory, and now, boldly flies in our commander’s face? An end, I say, to the traitor!” cried he, rising with a fierce scowl upon his handsome face, and laying his hand upon the jeweled hilt of his Toledo blade.

The quick eye of the emperor observed the speaker closely, and his vehement gestures told the monarch there was danger in the cavalier’s demeanor; he, therefore, demanded of Marina, while he shrank back from Alvarado, the meaning of this outburst; the beautiful Indian girl interpreted the words of the Spaniard, with more than their original fierceness, and, at the same time, prayed the monarch to conform to the wishes of the Christians. This he consented to do, for he seemed to be well convinced, from the manner of Alvarado’s address, that there was no safety save in submission.

Once more Montezuma was alone; and again he wept, wept long and violently—the bitter tears of a despairing and dispirited heart.

That night, a soldier who guarded one of the inner rooms of the great palace of Axajacatl, came quietly to Cortes, and told him that he had made a discovery. Cortes left his apartment and followed the man into one of the innermost chambers of the vast building, and here the soldier pointed out to him a crack in the wall, which revealed a room beyond, which was almost hidden in darkness. Cortes discovered a secret door, but it was fastened, and riveted with bolts of copper, which were green with age and mould; he bade the soldier break in the stone wall, which the latter obeyed, and, having procured torches, they entered the secret treasure-house of the Aztec emperor. Here, by the flash of the torches, was revealed the richest hoard that ever mortal eye fell upon; huge masses and bars of gold, and solid suns, wheels and ingots of the same metal were piled up and scattered around in profuse disorder; ponderous pieces of shining silver were here and there intermixed, while the farther corner from their place of entrance presented a sight that beggars

the stories of the wealth of the genii, or the mythological fable of Midas ; glittering heaps of precious stones, of all the hues of the rainbow, were confusedly garnered up, like harvest grain ; here were opals, amethysts, carbuncles, diamonds, rubies, strings of precious pearls, and the still more highly prized emeralds, whose green surfaces were polished to perfection, with a countless array of gems, upon which all the skill of the Aztec jewelers had been lavished, in carving heads, birds, houses, flowers, and figures, of every device which fancy could suggest. -Even Cortes, accustomed as he was to school his natural feelings, could not withhold his expression of astonishment and admiration, when he beheld this mine of untold and immeasurable riches. He stood mute with wonder for a time, gazing on the inexhaustible treasure which flashed with dazzling radiance from the gleam of the burning torches ; at length he whispered to the soldier, and they retired, and Cortes bade his companion close up the crevice, as before, and to beware how he gave currency to the secret of this chamber to his fellow soldiers.

Cortes had fixed his sight upon this world of wealth, and long after he had retired the golden dream came gleaming brightly through his mind ; the golden devil, Avarice, entered his heart, and devoured all other feelings ; the fine traits of fellowship and soldier-like bearing were merged ; the altar of religion in his soul was turned to gold ; even the glorious aim of ambition seemed lost and forgotten for the time, and the triumph of his cavaliers and the cross, his own advancement and glory, gave way to the vile and absorbing passion of gain ; the insatiable desire of acquisition, not for an end, but for itself alone ; the miser's unnatural love, which sets its sordid appetite to feed upon that which ever makes it hunger more ; and from the hour this passion seized upon him, Cortes became a different man, watchful and ever suspicious lest some one should discover the hoard upon which he had set his soul, or fearing that the soldier who had the keeping of this secret, should betray his trust. He pondered on it deeply at night, and ere the white-robed angel of the morning had rolled back the curtain of the dawn, this yellow devil, Avarice, had wrinkled the broad, manly brow of Hernando Cortes with another furrow.

CHAPTER XV.

MONTEZUMA now thought upon some means to conciliate the stern knight who held him in thralldom ; and after some days' reflection, he concluded to give his two favorite daughters, Tecuiclipa and Tecalco, to the Spaniard, and accordingly presented them with much pomp, in a private manner, to Cortes, in the great hall of the palace of Axajacatl, in the presence of the Christian officers and soldiery. Father Olmedo attempted to expostulate with Cortes upon the propriety of accepting these unregenerated heathens into his household, more especially as Cortes was a married man, with a wife then living in Cuba ; but the reasons of the worthy father were not sufficient to dissuade the general from his purpose, and as excuses are seldom found wanting to extenuate any act which one is resolved to perform, Cortes plausibly, but speciously, pleaded the propriety of taking the princesses into his charge, in order to secure a stronger hold upon the emperor's affection.

Father Olmedo knew too well the futility of opposition with the spirit with whom he had to deal, to remonstrate long against the course of conduct which he had already witnessed in the intercourse between Marina and the general, notwithstanding he had so often threatened him with the censure of the church.

Cortes argued, that if this was an error, that the circumstances justified the action, and that absolution would remove the stain of criminality, more especially when the ends to be attained were considered.

Cortes now began to show more leniency towards the sovereign, permitting him to go abroad with him, to take excursions upon the lakes in pursuit of wild fowl, or in the forests, where large bodies of natives would be sent out to form a vast circle enclosing all the animals and game in a wide extent of country ;

this cordon would gradually contract, driving before them deer, bears, wolves, buffaloes, antelopes, and many fierce beasts of prey, among which was often found the ocelot, a kind of inferior tiger, whose form was usually emblazoned on the armorial banners, as the insignia of Aztec royalty. Thus, in fishing and in the chase, was the captive emperor permitted to make a false show of liberty, thereby quieting the great body of his subjects; but this did not allay the fears and suspicions of Cacama, Guatemozin, Malmiztic, and their friends, who now stirred up the rancor and jealousy of the Tezcucans to its highest pitch, and Cuicuitca, who had been placed in authority in that city, by Cortes and Montezuma, was forcibly expelled and driven out.

No sooner had Cuitlahua heard of Montezuma giving Tecalco and Tecuiclipa to the care and custody of Cortes, than his impetuous nature was roused almost to madness; he sought Malmiztic and Guatemozin and communicated to them his intention of disregarding the commands, in future, either of Cortes or Montezuma, to which course the others assented in every point, and accordingly set about making such preparation for opposition as the critical condition of the country seemed to demand.

At this time, news suddenly came to the ears of Cortes, that the garrison which had been left upon the gulf coast, at Vera Cruz, under the command of Juan de Escalante, had been attacked, and that that valiant officer, as well as a number of his troops, had fallen. This enraged and alarmed the Spanish general, as it cut off the chief security he had against his own countrymen, who might, under the influence of Velasquez, harass him sorely. He instantly demanded the presence of Montezuma, and ordered him to account for this treacherous attack upon his officers. Montezuma denied it was with his knowledge that the crime was committed, whereupon Cortes, more incensed than ever, commanded the emperor at once to issue an order for the arrest of those persons who were the chiefs that led the attack against Escalante. With some hesitation the emperor gave the order, and, in a few days, they were brought captives to the city. The general held a kind of mock trial over them, the result of which was to condemn the whole of the prisoners to death! Accordingly, preparations were made in the great public square of

the city, for the execution of the sentence ; Cortes marched out his forces in military array, headed by Father Olmedo and his associate priests, escorting the slayers of Escalente, who, with their hands tied, were led to a wooden pillar standing in the open space of the public square, where they were bound, and the soldiery piled around them a huge heap of fagots, brushwood, and other combustibles. The priests, in their white robes, now stood before them, and walked around the funeral pyre, chanting a death dirge for the souls of the heathen, who were now to suffer the penalty of their offence. Cortes, with his proud figure drawn up to his full height, and his arms folded across his breast, gazed upon the victims with a fierce, unflinching eye, and when the religious rites and ceremonies were over, he calmly drew his sword and pointed the brilliant blade towards the prisoners, as they stood bound at the stake ; a number of soldiers instantly stepped forward, and with torches touched flame to the fagots ; the dry wood readily kindled into a blaze, and as the breeze freshened the fires, the sticks cracked as the tongues of the red flame began to lick out, like serpents' forks, through the dense, black volume of smoke. Now the strength of the gale would blow down the blaze, but it would arise with four-fold force, as the blast was lulled or passed momentarily away ; the hot smoke began to choke the captives, as could be heard by their coughing, before the fire had reached them, but it was not long before the kindling fragments burst out in such a blaze as to reach their forms ; the prisoners, who had hitherto uttered no complaint, at this terrific torture, gave a wild shriek of agonizing pain and despair, as the yellow and crimson waves of fire were rolled up against them, and flashed fantastically and fearfully over their heads ; that dreadful scream was their last, for the flames now entwined their bodies like writhing serpents, and in a few moments they were blackened and charred masses, having scarcely left the face or even the form of human beings—the lazy volumes of black smoke rolled off in the distance, and the stern Spaniard, with the martial band, returned to their quarters in the palace of Axajacatl.

From thence, Cortes went to his friends, and again consulted them ; the result of which communication was made visible

shortly afterwards, by his calling upon Montezuma, and charging him with having treacherously connived at the death of Escalante. It was in vain that the monarch pleaded and protested that he had done nothing in the matter, and that due reparation had been made in the death of the chiefs, who had been burned; Cortes would listen to no explanation, but ordered his guards to seize upon the emperor and load him with chains. At this attempt, the monarch was astounded; he was first silent, with incredulity; and, in another instant, he raved and stormed, vowing the vengeance of his people and his gods upon the heads of the insolent Christian.

"Men, do your duty," said Cortes, in an unmistakable tone of command, to his attendants; and immediately they seized upon the unfortunate monarch and bound him fast in chains!

When he saw the fetters upon his limbs, and heard the clanks of the iron links, all the prophesies of former times came back upon him; the predictions of his soothsayers, his sister's visions, and the malediction of Malmiztic, fell upon him like a heavy load, beneath whose weight his soul staggered, and his body, all powerless, sank, as if stricken by old age. His destiny, against which hope had long contended with fate, now seemed inevitably and irrevocably fixed; despair suddenly seized upon him, and the fear of death came vividly in his eyes, for he now felt himself hanging by a hair above a frightful precipice, and Cortes, like one of the fatal sisters, standing ready to clip that strand.

Before a beautiful palace, in the city of Tezcucó, was a highly ornamented park, irrigated by clear silver streams, which burst forth from quaintly carved fountains, and ran through groves of thick-leaved, flowering trees, whose foliage darkened the daylight by its profusion, and offered a cool retreat from the heat of the meridian sun. In this park were collected the nobles of Tezcucó; and in their midst, mounted on a throne, which was erected against a giant ceiba tree, was Cacama, with his council. By his side, with a calm, dignified majesty, sat Malmiztic; below them, upon seats arranged in an amphitheatrical form, were thousands upon thousands of Tezcucans, and people from the neighboring towns and provinces. These immense masses were gathered to

hear what Cacama and his counsellors had to say in regard to the course of Montezuma.

Amid the multitude were immense numbers of beautiful women, whose dark, bright eyes flashed up from among the crowd, as the Toltec rose from his seat, with grace and dignity, and drawing his dark robe around him, glanced over the heads of that vast assemblage, with the quiet self-possession of one accustomed to command.

At first, murmurs were heard from those whom the priesthood had taught to abhor the worshipper of the unknown and invisible God ; but the Toltec spake not a word until these sounds died away ; and then, when all was quiet, he began, in his clear, sonorous voice to address the audience ; every word was distinct, and as the magic of his tones fell upon the ear, they vibrated to the heart with an electric thrill. As he proceeded to depict the condition of the country, his ardor became more enthusiastic ; and while with one hand he caught the ample folds of his robe about him, he seemed, by the easy gesture of the other, to scatter the words which fell like flowers from his lips, to the multitude below, who now caught them with eager interest.

As he went onward with his subject, he seemed to hold the audience enchanted, and wrought them up to the highest degree of all-absorbing excitement ; he seemed like a sun which sent down a bright beam into the mind of each and every hearer ; he grasped his theme with the full power of his giant intellect, and over the darkest doubts that intellect flashed, and, in an instant, the gloomy and obscure veil was rent, and the light of his mind revealed every hidden object, like the red lines of lightning which run along a black bank of storm-clouds ; and then the persuasive tones of his voice came forth as clear and as sweet as the music of silver bells, while his manly and magnificent countenance seemed like the mirror, wherein the winged thoughts which he uttered were reflected, ere they flew away upon the bosom of the passing zephyr.

It was a glorious sight, to behold men and women, of all ranks and ages, listening with the same intense interest, and seeming all to kneel and drink at once from the great fountain of his

eloquence, whose silver stream leaped forth from its hidden and unknown source, as from a cave, and went smiling on its way with an unruffled current and surface of sunshine.

When his powerful and thrilling oration was concluded, he calmly took his seat, with the same serene countenance with which he rose; but the host sent up a shout which shivered the leaves of the huge ceiba trees overhead, and shout after shout rang forth as the excited populace sprang up, clapping their hands and making manifestations of delight.

Cacama was now called for, loudly. The lord of Tezcuco stood forth, clad in his robes of state—and these were not unfit habiliments, for a noble and lofty bearing characterized Cacama, blended with a frank suavity, which won the eye of the beholder.”

“Tezcucans, Aztecs, and friends,” he began: “we are called together by a common cause, in which you are equally interested, namely, the general welfare of the Aztec empire. I feel, and know, the deep wrong, which would be wrought against our nation, did I not take upon me the responsibility of proclaiming, that we are badly governed—did not the voice of the times proclaim it in thunder tones. That which would ordinarily be treason, I now fearlessly pronounce, and challenge contradiction. Fellow-countrymen, I rise to deplore the condition, the lamentable condition, of the Aztec monarchy. We have an empire, but no emperor. Yea, I repeat it, the pusillanimity of the king of Mexico, robs him of his honors of sovereignty; and, though he be my lord, and nearer still, my uncle, I discard him from my respect, as a man, and hurl him from a seat in my heart as a kinsman! Behold! by his acquiescence, what authority these strangers have acquired in the centre of our empire; burrowing, like a worm, in the heart of a blossom, they will, if permitted to progress, blast the beauties of our mother country in the full, bursting bud of her glory. Behold! how far this spirit of conciliation and concession has gone: first, it violates the sacredness of our city; and, secondly, it makes the dupe pay the penalty of his wavering policy; yea! it outrages the person of your king, by imprisonment; and, lastly, loads him with chains, in return for his paltry submission. And how has all this ended? by hurling our gods to the earth, and in their stead setting up a

new deity. And what will be the result of such a course? I will tell you, fellow-countrymen; you will behold the stranger dwelling in your homes; your proudest temples made barracks for their butchers; your green fields blasted, burnt, and blackened; your wives and daughters food for their foul lusts, and yourselves—a wretched wreck of what you once were—a poor, homeless race of wanderers; and when a century shall have passed away, there shall be nothing left behind of you but a name, a name that the bearer will blush to hear mentioned—a name that will be the jest and mockery of all the honorable of earth. Gods! have we no country to strike for? Will you be quietly robbed of your liberty?—be imprisoned?—chained?—burnt?—Mexitli forbid!”

Cacama now laid off his crown, and holding a maquahuilit aloft, in a graceful and imposing attitude, he said, with a thrilling and determined voice;

“It is time now to fight, for our religion, for our country, for our liberty, and for our honor: before the power of these men is increased by reinforcements from their own country, or new alliances in this.”

At this moment, messengers arrived from Cortes and Montezuma, and demanded that Cacama should come to Cortes.—When this news was delivered, Cacama replied from his rostrum:

“Return you to your master, and say to him I shall come; not, however, as he expects me, but with my sword bared to strike for my country’s cause, or perish for her sake! I had rather be the martyr that saved Tezcucó’s rights, a bleeding and torn corse in her streets, than to be the prince who sat in her palace halls, and owned that he held his station there at the price of his country’s shame. Men of Tezcucó, and all you, friends, who love our common land, have I your sanction, when I say, I will not sacrifice the honor of our nation and our gods?”

“Aye!” answered a legion of voices.

“Then, back,” said Cacama, “to your white-faced lord, and my white-hearted uncle, and tell them that yonder silver fountains, of Chapoltepec, shall be purple with blood, before a single Tezcucan shall call himself a slave!”

Cheer after cheer again woke the welkin, and echoed even to the

far shores of lake Chalco ; and the deputation, dumb with astonishment, left the dispersing multitude, to communicate Cacama's answer to Cortes and his captive emperor. Cuicuitca, after these events, resolved to court the favor of the Christian and his uncle, and accordingly departed from Tezcuco, but not before he had received assurances that the friends of Montezuma would find no favor and little comfort in the limits of the now revolted city of Tezcuco, who had, as it were, drawn herself up in a hostile attitude towards the proud queen of the Aztec empire, who frowned vengeance upon her, from her throne set high in the bosom of the bright blue lake.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was the hour of midnight, and of such a night as is never known in northern lands. The curved shell of the moon ran like a silver boat through the deep blue sea of heaven ; and the night wind breathing soft as the breath of an angel, came laden with the warm, aromatic incense of flowering vanilla vines and ambrosial cactii.

Close under the walls of the castle of Axajacatl, the sentinel soldier of Cortes paced back and forth upon his beaten track ; and through the reeds of a latticed window, the gleam of a lamp, burning within, revealed the forms of Tecalco and the Spanish general ; the services of Marina, as an interpreter, had been dispensed with, for Cortes had discovered a jealousy lurking in her eye, which could not be disguised, but which rather became more apparent from her effort to dissemble, for the excited eye of the girl of Tobasco burned like a diamond in darkness, while, upon the part of Tecalco, the presence of Marina had been the safeguard to which she had clung, to avoid the advances of the Christian, whose designs, being evident, filled the delicate mind of the Aztec maid with loathing and horror. She determined to meet the emergency with such a spirit as should convince her base assailant, that the daughter of a king had qualities which comported with the honor of an imperial ancestry. They sat near each other upon a handsomely embroidered lounge ; Cortes took the fair hand of Tecalco in his own, and gazed upon its exquisite mould ; the tapering roundness of the alabaster-like fingers, with their rosy-tipped nails ; the hand was passively permitted to remain, and Cortes even pressed it to his lips, without any evidence of resistance on her part, by which he was so far emboldened, as to offer to imprint the like upon her lips. Tecalco shuddering shrunk away, and, dropping upon her knees,

beside the lounge, she looked imploringly in his face, and clasping both hands before her bosom, gazed steadfastly upon his countenance, until the brimful lakes of her lovely eyes overflowed, and gemmed her cheeks with liquid jewels; there was all the guilelessness of innocence in her look—a dove-like maiden modesty, where blushes blent with tears, and formed a picture more powerful and touching, even in its dumb, unspeaking silence, than words could have strength to portray.

But this silent prayer of beauty and innocence touched not the inflamed heart of Cortes; the unholy purposes of his bosom burned within him; lawless appetite and demoniac desire nullified and dissipated the tear which sympathy would have drawn from his heart's fountain; he stooped and clasped her waist, as she knelt suffused in tears and silent supplication at his feet. No sooner did she feel the pressure of his arm encircling her body, than she sprang back in the flash of an eye, and drew her enchanting form up to its full height, and threw back her fairy head like an angered basilisk, while the cheek, which a moment before was crimson with the soft blushes of modesty, was now white as the pale bosom of the magnolia; and the eye, which was melting with the most touching tenderness, now quivered in its dark beauty, as she fixed it, with an intense and piercing glance, full upon the eye of Cortes. It was a look which startled even the stern general, accustomed as he was to restrain expressions of surprise.

At this moment, a rattling noise was heard at the reeds with which the window was latticed, and Tecalco, giving a shriek, sprang towards it, and, by some superhuman power, seemed to be lifted through to the outside, as if upon wings; but the astonishment of Cortes was only momentary; drawing his sword, he leaped after her in an instant. At that moment when he had reached the ground without the window, a blow came upon his bared sword from an unseen hand, which shivered the blade and almost paralyzed his arm. Maddened with disappointment and pain, he sprang with naked hands, weaponless, in the direction in which he had seen a dark, swift body disappear; but catching no second glance of it, he bethought him to call the guard, when, by the flash of a gun through the thick shrubbery of the garden,

he beheld the sentinel falling before the blade of Malmiztic, with whom he had been struggling, and Tecalco darting away like a bird through the shadows of night. The sound of the gun brought, of a sudden, half the camp around the spot, where they beheld Cortes supporting the sentinel's head.

"Fly, fly!" cried he, "a thousand ducats for the head of the villain Malmiztic!"

"Whither did he fly?" inquired Sandoval.

"There, to the left, amid the rose trees, where the vines are thickest!"

"Have at him!" cried Sandoval, leaping off in pursuit.

"About the garden wall, men; quick there without!" exclaimed Alvarado.

"Let us meet them to the right," shouted De Olid, as he bounded away in a different direction.

"Diaz, give me thy sword," said Cortes, as that good old soldier came up and took the wounded sentinel, and handed his heavy falchion to his commander.

"Now, scoundrel, infidel," continued Cortes, muttering to himself, as he grasped the sword with an iron gripe, "let us see if thou canst shiver this arm again, like the touch of a torpedo," and away he plunged into the thicket, which was now lighted up in all directions, by the torches of the soldiers, who were busy, in every quarter, upon the search.

Long did they toil, but fruitlessly. At length, conceiving that the fugitives would make an effort to escape from the city, Cortes ordered his men to scour the lake shores, and the canals towards Tepejacac and Tacuba, while he, with a small party, would look towards Iztapalapan.

As they went, Botello, a pretended astrologer in the camp, came and informed the general, that it had been revealed to him, by the stars, that the Tezcucan, Cacama, was now in his palace by the side of lake Chalco.

"Thy ears upon this now, stargazer!" cried Cortes; "come, and if thou deceivest me, I do not read my stars aright if thy back be free from stripes, for I now search, with all means and haste, the bold infidel, Malmiztic, who hath escaped with my ward, the emperor's daughter."

"Then, as there is truth in the stars, that was he who passed yon point of land, almost but now, and made across the lake with such spirit-like speed—and, by the witch of the moon! there he goes now," continued he, pointing his finger; "Canst thou not discern him? see, where his boat, almost out of sight, passes over the lake like a shadow."

"Nay, I see nothing," answered Cortes, shielding his eyes with his hand, from the moon.

"Yea, there he goes!" replied Botello, "with a long white or silvery stream upon the water in his wake; it flashes in the moonshine like a comet on the wave. Now, a comet, whose tail points to the north, portends disasters and wars; and a comet, whose tail points to the south"—

"The devil and St. Anthony ride away with you on a comet's tail!" exclaimed Cortes, petulantly; "show me the boat of that dark infidel."

"Here, then, come close to me," said the pseudo-astrologer, "see you not, under the dark shadow of yon distant mountain, where it meets the line of the moonlight upon the lake; a black boat, which darts swiftly along, and makes the ruffled waters rise up from their bed of darkness, and shimmer in the blaze of the moon—which moon will be nine days old in an hour hence?"

"Go to, with this trash of stars and of moon!" said Cortes, hurriedly; "I seek not heavenly bodies—it is the devil's minions that I am in pursuit of. I know not when rain will come, but catch me that night-eyed Toltec, and I can tell thee when there will be fire! To the boats now, and away, without loss of time, to the palace by the lake side," cried Cortes, to his men who followed.

In a short time, the soldiers were making their way, with all possible speed, across towards lake Chalco; and all the way Botello gave assurances that the aspect of the stars was most favorable for their purposes, to which Cortes, suffering from the painful shock his arm had received, would answer, by assuring the reader of the stars, that something would go wrong in his horoscope if neither Malmiztic nor Cacama were found.

At length, they approached the spot of their destination; it was a scene of surpassing beauty; rising out of the very bosom

of the lake, whose clear, deep waters washed its massive walls, was a palace of gigantic dimensions, with every proportion, so symmetrical in its outline and detail, that as Cortes and his crew stole silently upon it, under the protecting shade of the banks of the lake, they could but feel as if they were approaching a castle of the genii. Everything was hushed; it was the depth of night, and the solemn black walls lifted themselves up before the boat's crew in sublime grandeur; and the huge shadow upon the lake seemed like another submarine palace of vast proportions looming up out of the hidden deep.

The boats were quietly moored under the shade of bending trees, which fringed the shore, and the soldiers stepped upon land with an orderly but stealthy tread.

Cortes commanded them, in a whisper, to encircle the castle completely, and gradually close in, so as to prevent the escape of any who might be within the walls of the palace.

It was the hour of the night's deepest silence; the moonlight rested upon everything like a spell; and not a murmur could be heard, save now and then the strange, wild notes of a mocking-bird breaking forth beautifully from the leafy darkness of a thickly-tangled bower, where creeping vines, laden with bloom, distilled through the night air a ravishing and powerful perfume.

They cautiously advanced, in a circle, towards the dark gigantic pile; but when they came upon it, no warder guarded the gate—no sentinel was posted at the portal—all was quiet—the unbroken slumber of nature. And now, more than ever, did it seem to them like the huge, black home of some old enchanter.

Cortes himself led the way into the great hall, through a high arched doorway, guarded upon each side by two monstrous idols, who stood like spectres, with their stony eyes fixed and dull, but seemingly bent upon the passer-by. The glare of the lamps and lanterns, which the soldiers bore, shed a strange light around, and the echoes of their footsteps upon the smooth marble floor, despite every precaution, rang hollowly along its deep vault overhead. They entered chamber after chamber, but no being was found. After having traversed the whole suite of rooms below, Cortes came upon a broad flight of stairs, which led up to a great height to a second story; here, they opened the doors of a superb

saloon, where all the signs of late festivities were visible ; menials were lying upon mats on the floor ; and upon beautifully-embroidered lounges, were several figures in elegant robes ; and in one of these Cortes recognized the manly form and face of Cacama.

Cortes now whispered to his soldiery, and each crept up, with his drawn sword, in front of one of the sleepers. Cortes had advanced to take Cacama in person, when his eye fell upon the heavy and powerful frame of a man in a black mantle, whose quick ear, catching the sound of a whisper, had started up on his elbow from his couch, and brushed his black locks from his still darker eyes, as he bent them with astonishment upon Cortes and his companions.

" 'Tis he ! " shouted the general ; " seize him ! a thousand ducats for him, dead or alive ! a cross of St. Iago and a captaincy to the captor ! The infidel, Malmiztic ! upon him, upon him ! "

Half the soldiers in the hall rushed, in an instant, towards the couch, but the Toltec sprang away with a tremendous bound, and leaped towards a secret side-door, and was rushing out, when Cortes cried :

" Fire ! fire upon him ! shoot as he flies ! " In a moment, muskets flashed, and balls shivered the panels and wainscoats where the Toltec had passed.

" Pursue him ! " cried Cortes, " let him not escape ; follow close upon him ; press hard. For the love of God and the Virgin, let him not pass free ! Haste, haste ! " he shouted, hurrying on after those who pressed hard upon the heels of Malmiztic.

The Toltec had now gained a small interior room of great beauty, and furnished in the most gorgeous and luxurious style ; he darted to a couch curtained with feather work, and tearing the drapery away, he seized, with a sudden and violent grasp, the form of a female, and twirling her around like an infant, threw her across his broad shoulders, and ran into another apartment. A soldier following, raised his gun to fire upon the flying form, when Cortes struck the weapon down, and cried :

" Hold ! who harms the woman yonder villain bears off, dies ! Seize him alive ! There is no exit here, he cannot escape ; close

the doors, and let him not pass, save over your dead bodies. Ha, ha ! we have him now—there is no outlet for the dog—this room has but one door. Ho, there, thou giant infidel, yield thee ! thou bronzed-faced heathen, hear ye not ? Ay, 'tis useless to draw that dazzling blade, it can avail thee naught, for we have numbers for thee. But I waste my words—the dog knows not the language of Castile—close on him men."

The Toltec had ceased his flight, but had not dropped his burthen ; and as the Christians moved slowly up, he moved towards a window, which overlooked, at a vast height, the deep waters of the lake, which far below lay quietly against the castle walls. Malmiztic turned his eyes, first upon the black flood beneath, dark with the shadow of the palace, and then upon his pursuers, who were now nearing him every movement. Again he surveyed the dizzy distance, which made the head swim with giddiness to gaze upon ; and again he fixed his black and burning eyes upon Cortes, who cried :

"Seize him !"

"Ha, ha, ha !" a hollow laugh resounded, which was the only reply which Cortes caught from the Toltec, as the latter leaped out of the window with his charge, and went whirling down through the darkness into the deep. The night air echoed back against the castle wall the sound of a body plunging in the wave, and, as quick as thought, the soldiers were at the window pointing their muskets down towards the dark bosom of the lake.

"Hold !" cried Cortes, "fire not upon them ; rush down the stairway and seize him as he comes ashore—away, lose not an instant ; he is swifter than the flight of an arrow, and slippery as Proteus. Seize upon Cacama, and secure his minions," said he to Botello, as he passed down the palace hall in haste, and hurried to the lake side in search of the Toltec, where his men were already vainly searching.

The black shadow of the castle wall lay moveless upon the surface of the lake, and the soft ripples beat gently against its solid stone foundation. They sought all along the base of the wall, and by the lake shore, and scanned the waters in all directions, but the Toltec and Tecalco were nowhere visible.

But the result of the expedition was by no means fruitless, for

Botello, with a few others, had taken the precaution to secure Cacama and his companions, and with these they returned across the lake to the city. Cortes, however, was in no gentle mood, for the escape of Malmiztic and the princess had more than overbalanced the gratification of capturing Cacama; but this disappointment did not reach its climax until he had arrived at the castle of Axajacatl, by which time the grey streaks of the dawn had melted away into a vast sea of light, where waves of silver were crested with a rosy fringe.

Cortes commanded Cacama to be loaded with chains, and secured within a secret dungeon of the castle; and having seen that this order was strictly complied with, he came forth, when he was informed, that during the confusion which had occurred in the night, Tecuiclipa had escaped, as well as Tecalco. At this news, Cortes was furious; he raved and stamped his iron heel upon the stone pavement, while his countenance became dark with the volume of blood which rushed to his face.

"I see it all," said he to himself, "this is the work of Guatemozin, and he shall pay the penalty, or I grossly err. By my conscience! it were a pretty piece of folly to permit such insolence to go unpunished. See," said he, turning to an officer, "that search be made for the princess, in every direction, and to him that shall produce, in my camp, the head of Guatemozin, or Malmiztic, the Toltec, I will give half their weight in gold. Go, and bring the infidel, Montezuma, to me, and then dispatch to execute my command."

The officer soon returned with Montezuma, wearing chains; with Cortes and Marina, he visited the cell where Cacama was confined. The captive was lying upon the cold stone floor when they entered, his fine head drooping gloomily upon his breast; but the moment his eye caught a glance of Montezuma, he startled up to his full height, and, without noticing Cortes, he bent his intelligent gaze upon his uncle, and with a voice trembling with agitation and irony, he said:

"I am glad to see you here, for I have learned that I am indebted to Montezuma for my presence in this prison-house. A faithful servant has told me, that you informed the Christian astrologer where I could be found. You, my uncle! you, whom

I have sought to save, whose kingdom I was ready to risk my life to preserve, and whose person I would have held as sacred as the heart of Huitzilopotchtli; I, who would have set you free, struck those degrading shackles from your arms, and placed within your hands the maquahuitl, which would have laid this stern stranger's warriors in the dust. Oh, gods! was it for such a man as this that I periled everything—my people, my country, my liberty, my life? For a man, who could basely betray his own blood? for a heart, whose black ingratitude turns to gall the sweet current of kindred blood?

“Oh, Tezcuco! city of my fathers, how art thou sunken from thy wonted greatness! Would Nezahualpilli have yielded thee without a struggle? Nay, he would rather have strewed the lake shore, for miles, with countless corpses, and left his own purple blood to blend with Tezcuco's blue waters, than to shamelessly have yielded, without a struggle, the honorable heritage of his ancestry.

“Oh, Tezcuco! three years have I sat upon thy throne, and five and twenty summers have fled since thou gavest me birth; but my brothers Coanaca and Ixtliloxchitl have deserted me, and Cuicuitca, my half-brother in blood, and less than half in feeling, has turned traitor, and sold his country and his brother into the hands of the stranger.

“Montezuma! may the god, who sits in the land of shadows, blot out of your book of memory this indelible crime; may your conscience forgive you—what your country never can. But I, whom you have so cruelly betrayed, pity and pardon the craven spirit which made you, through fear of these bloody Spaniards, cause me to be seized, when I was defending your rights and your crown—when you yourself shrank back from your duty in supporting and maintaining them.

“Yes, Montezuma, I am glad to see you, for I wish you to see how a man can die, who dies for his country, his king, and his gods. I have done all that I could, to save you, and, behold, my reward is death! Then, welcome death, welcome, thou thin shadowy messenger, who beckonest me across the mysterious river, to the land where my forefathers dwell in the bright mansions of the sun!

“Montezuma, as they bore me captive hither, in the grey light of the morning, through the valley where the fog was a thousand fathoms deep, far in the distance over the burnished sea of mist, I saw the silver shaft of Popocatepetl, and upon its sky-wrapped pinnacle, blazing like a hundred suns, I saw the face of Huitzilopochtli, and its radiant beams seemed to set the mountain all on fire!—forests, rocks, and all! And then, I heard a small voice in the air which seemed to speak from afar, and yet its tones would have deafened the thunder god, and it cried:

“‘Woe to the Aztec crown! her last king liveth; but night and darkness shall sit in his seat; the usurper’s hand shall scatter the jewels of her diadem, and the gold of her glory shall be as sands buried in the bed of a running river; the bat shall brood in her banquet hall, and he who hath deserted his country and his gods, henceforth must dwell with demons, in darkness—in the realm of smoke, whose only outlet is the fiery mouth of Popocatepetl!’

“The light was gone; I heard the voice no more; the wavy sea of gold lay stretched out for leagues—and all was still as death.

“‘I am glad to have seen thee, Montezuma, for I did wish to tell thee this before I died. Perchance, thou’lt say it was a dream, a vision of the brain? Go, ask my old minstrel, when I am gone—he saw the scene. And now, farewell! Let death come when it may, Tezcuco shall never blush for what Cacama did.’”

With this, the young king relapsed into a state of gloom; and even the iron heart of Cortes could scarce keep from overflowing, as the high-souled patriotism of Cacama reproached the tamer policy of his uncle; nevertheless, he departed with the emperor and Marina, and left the faithful and heroic Tezcucan king to waste his spirits in chains and darkness.

Cortes now proceeded to Tezcuco, where, in the name of Montezuma, he proclaimed Cuicuitca king, and persuaded all the nobles and officers of state to acknowledge him; and, accordingly, he was received with acclamations and triumphal arches.

Immediately after this, Cortes took in perfidious captivity the

king of Tlacopan, and the lord of Tlatelolco, and also the lord of Cojohuacan, who was a brother of Montezuma; and, to crown all, he seized upon Cuitlahua, prince of Iztapalapan, and compelled the whole of them to acknowledge fealty to the Spanish crown!

Such was the beginning of the European feudal system in the western world.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE anxiety of the public throughout Tenochtitlan was now intense, and the nobility, in a body, had demanded of Cortes the privilege of communicating with their king upon the state of the country, and the power by which this demand was backed, rendered refusal most unsafe, and it was, therefore, granted. The result of the consultation was to arouse the spirit of Montezuma, and, when he returned, he not only demanded his release, but peremptorily insisted that Cortes should immediately evacuate the country, and withdraw his Tlascalan allies from the city. Cortes offered, as an excuse, a lack of ships to transport his troops back again to Cuba. To this, Montezuma replied, that he would agree to build and provide them for him forthwith. Cortes tacitly consented to this proposition, not however with the design of complying with it, but for the purpose of gaining time. But this promise gave only a temporary satisfaction or quietude, for, daily, the murmurs grew more and more loud, until Montezuma again called for another audience with the Spanish general, and set forth the demands of the people for his retiring from the Aztec territory, and the certain rebellion of the people, if the Spaniards determined to remain and keep a body of hostile Tlascalans encamped in the centre of the city.

While in the midst of this interview, Cortes received information from Sandoval, whom he had stationed at Vera Cruz, after the death of Escalante, that eighteen ships and thirteen hundred men had arrived upon the coast; under the command of one Narvaez (he, who was to have had the command of the ships in which Cortes originally came), with twelve pieces of artillery and eighty-five horses. When this news was broken to Cortes, in the presence of Montezuma, it was accompanied by a proclamation branding the Spanish general as a rebel and a traitor! But the

coolness of Cortes did not forsake him ; he betrayed not a single emotion, and Montezuma's utmost scrutiny could not detect the shadow of that embarrassment with which a common soul would have been confounded ; but Cortes assured the emperor that they were friends, and as a proof thereof, he informed him, that he intended to set out immediately to meet them.

Cortes now saw danger thicken around him upon every hand ; but it was only an emergency like the present, which could call forth his active genius. He, therefore, left Alvarado, with one hundred and forty Christians, and the Tlascalan allies, to hold possession of the capital, and he proceeded, with seventy choice cavaliers of the cross, and some Mexican nobility, to the city of Tlascala, where he called upon the senate and demanded four thousand warriors, which were granted ; and next, he passed over to Chinantla, and made a similar requisition for two thousand men, and three hundred pikes, which being obtained, he proceeded to Cholula ; from thence he descended towards the coast, with a rapidity almost unparalleled in the annals of marches. In the route, he met Sandoval, coming up from Vera Cruz with sixty men, among whom were two who had been sent to Villa Rica, by Narvaez, to demand a surrender, but upon whom Sandoval had seized and detained—not much, however, against their wishes, for Pamphilo Narvaez was, despite his tall, commanding figure, and fine face, a narrow-souled miser, of whose service and meanness they were heartily tired.

Cortes, therefore, changed the course of Sandoval and his party, and hurried down from the mountains and table-lands, into the terra calienta, with its burning air and gigantic forest trees, its profusion and luxuriance of vegetation.

Cortes, before his departure from the city, had dispatched Father Olmedo and Velasquez de Leon to Narvaez, with a commission to make an amicable arrangement of the affairs of both parties. After the embassy had arrived and held a conference with Narvaez, the latter permitted them to depart in peace, but sent out a party to waylay and recapture them. This band were stationed in the forest, and as the holy father and his companion came riding quietly along, they sprang suddenly out upon them ; but Velasquez, seeing the plot which was laid for them, gave whip

and spur to his swift mare, and shouting to his more fleshy companion, the worthy Olmedo, he darted by the enemy, followed immediately by the reverend prelate, who dropped, for a time, the ease and gravity of the priest, and put on the activity of a knight-errant. The pursuit was kept up at no tardy pace, for as they darted away through the forest, the rocks, the ravines, and the open plains, if they turned their heads but for a moment, they could behold their pursuers hard upon them. Away they sped, Velasquez sitting in his saddle as bolt upright and firm as a man of steel, save when he would bow his head, as he passed rapidly under the branches of a tree, or glanced back momentarily to catch a glimpse of the fierce party who followed at his heels.

Father Olmedo was not so well mounted, but to make amends, he plied, from time to time, his stout staff upon the back and hams of his beast, and leaned a great way forward, as if anxious to be in advance of his horse, and prudently exposing as little of his person as possible to the chance shots of the enemy. It was a chase of no common character—men were the game of one party, and life of the other—and the latter, having the greater stake, made every effort and strained every nerve to increase the distance between themselves and those who followed. This they at length accomplished, by a turn in the mountains, where by a manœuvre of riding up for some considerable way in the bed of a running stream which sometimes was so steep as to form a torrent, they left the enemy lost, by not being able to discover the tracks of their steeds. At length darkness came on, and under its friendly cover they quietly pursued their way in safety, but with a very slow and heavy pace, for the poor animals were sorely jaded by this flight for hours over plain and mountain forest, and flood.

The next day, they came upon the troops led by Cortes, who were coming down through the country by rapid marches, and joining with them, they turned once again towards Narvaez. The streams were found to be full, as they urged their way onward through the rich valley, where rank and luxuriant forest trees sheltered them from the intense heat of the sun.

As they neared the spot where they knew Narvaez to be encamped, which was hard by Chempoalla, the face of the country

changed, and they found fine fertile meadows, rich with thick grass, upon which green nourishment the horses, in their halts, grazed plentifully.

Narvaez had fortified himself in an ancient, ruined city, in a lofty temple built of large blocks of stone, which, however, had become somewhat dilapidated. This giant structure was surrounded by a circle of similar temples, filled with their idols, but more diminutive in size than the chief temple, in and around which he had planted his cannon, for defence, with order and regularity.

Cortes lay, with his men hidden in the fertile meadows on the river banks, not distant more than a mile from the heathen temples, wherein Narvaez was quartered. Cortes now addressed his men with one of those warm, enthusiastic speeches which lighted up the latent fires in every bosom, and made them burn to follow their intrepid and invincible commander.

As the night came, he advanced, having given Sandoval orders to attack the quarters of Narvaez himself, in the ancient temple, and directed Captain Pizarro, a young soldier, whose name afterwards became famous in Peru, to seize the guns.

As darkness had fallen, they quietly closed in upon the camp of Narvaez; as they were advancing through the gloom, they came upon an outpost, where two sentinels were stationed, one of whom they captured, but the other, escaping by his extraordinary activity, gave the alarm to the camp.

Before these events occurred, showers had been falling frequently during the night, and in the intervals, the moon's great white face would look forth from the black towering clouds, like the visage of a giant genius, gazing through his dark castle's window.

The sentinel had given the alarm, and instantly the whole camp was in commotion; the men were placed in a position of defence, and everything was prepared for resistance, with a promptitude which spoke well for the discipline of Narvaez.

Cortes now pushed on the attack, and the whole face of the heavens darkened, at this moment, and the rain fell heavily; but still he pressed close upon the spot where he could discover the dim outline of the huge, old temple, and its satellites, vaguely shadowed forth against the inky sky.

The attack now began, and the soldiery of Narvaez, having

discovered themselves to Cortes and his company, by their torches, became shining marks, upon whom Cortes commanded his men to open their fire; and, in a moment more, the deep silence of the night was broken by the thunder of guns, and the red flashes glared through the deep darkness, like meteors streaming through the gloom.

As they rushed upon the quarters of the enemy, among the ruined temples, again the volleys from Cortes and his comrades rang upon the midnight air; and, at this moment, a singular phenomenon occurred, which wrought Cortes a greater part of the battle: for, as his soldiery kept up their fire steadily, certain insects, in the shape of flying beetles, with a kind of phosphoric light, rose from the damp earth, or the wet leaves of the neighboring forests, and gave a momentary blaze, which went out again instantaneously; multitudes of large fire-flies, aroused by the moisture, flashed around in the darkness, so that, amid the roar of guns, Narvaez looked forth, and fancied that the quarters and the woods around were alive with enemies, and that the gleams of fire, in all directions, were lighted matches and the flames of musketry; but, nevertheless, he fought with desperation, and shouted encouragement to his men, until forced, by the others as they rushed on, to retreat into the temple.

Every foot and inch was contended for by the parties, as they fought together in the obscure gloom of the moonless night. The clang of swords rang through the echoing halls of the old ruins, as Cortes and his confederates mounted the great stairway of stone, which led in a broad flight up to the temple, in which Narvaez was posted; and as they rushed upward, they shouted, with wild enthusiasm, the martial cry of "Spirituo Santo! Spirituo Santo!" which thrilling sounds were met, in mid air, by the counter cry of "Santa Maria! Santa Maria!"

And now, the clang of arms was terrible, as the hosts, with gleaming torches, ran through the giant halls of this temple of idolatry; swords rang loud upon shields, and lances would strike heavily upon breastplate or helmet; while in the courts without, the roar of musketry was unceasing, and the twang of cross-bows could be heard, as the opponents discovered each other through the shadows of the night.

Within the rooms of the giant ruin, blows were dealt hand to hand, and shouts and cheers made the hollow halls resound again. The fight grew more and more fierce; amid the confusion Cortes at length commanded the long, loose leaves of aloe and palm, with which some of the outer buildings were thatched, to be fired. No sooner were the torches touched to the overhanging eaves, than despite the dampness, the whole of the roofs burst forth in a red blaze; and, at that instant, Cortes sprang onward, and cried, "Spirituo Santo! Spirituo Santo!" and it was echoed in a breath by a hundred followers.

"A thousand ducats," cried he, "for Narvaez!" and away they darted through the windings of the old temples.

In a moment more, Sandoval could be seen, by the reflection of the burning buildings, hot in pursuit of a tall, flying figure, which was attempting to escape from him and his companion, Pizarro, and to take shelter behind the dark and intricate stonework of the heathen idol's sanctuary. Sandoval hastily pressed upon him, when the figure turned face about, by a marble pillar, almost hid in the obscurity of the gloomy altar, and dealt a blow at Sandoval, as he hurried by; but the weapon missed him in the darkness, as well as Pizarro, who followed after Sandoval into another recess of the temple, which opened beyond, as might be seen by the stream of light which shone through the old stone window at the extremity, from the buildings which were now burning opposite, and sending up a crimson glare to mingle with the black gloom of midnight.

The figure which Sandoval had seen, was Narvaez himself, who now attempted to escape from his hiding-place, by running towards the outer court, when, hearing footsteps coming so fast upon the solid stone floor, Sandoval stopped, and cried:

"Halt! hold! who passes?"

No answer being given, he dealt a blow in the dark, and a death-like shriek was heard, and, in an instant, a soldier named Farfan, running in an opposite direction, with a flaming torch in one hand, and a sword in the other, met the flying form of Narvaez, who, reeling and staggering, exclaimed:

"Santa Maria! they have killed me — they have struck out one of my eyes!"

Farfan gave a glance into his white face, and beheld the brow of Narvaez laid wide open with a fearful gash, and the piteous cry of the wounded captain too true—his eye was cut out, and a crimson stream coursed down over his sandy beard. Farfan instantly seized upon him, and bore him away to Cortes, who had, by this time, entirely routed the enemy, and compelled them to cry for quarter—for fifteen of their number lay dead upon the marble floor, and many wounded were groaning upon every hand.

Thus came into the hands of the conquering Cortes, the whole army of Pamphilo de Narvaez, as well as himself, whom Velasquez had dispatched to seize Cortes, under the order of Bishop of Burgos, while the emperor, Charles V, of Spain, was absent in Flanders.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHILE Cortes was now master of two thousand men, and a hundred horses, upon the coast, Alvarado, with his men and allies, held possession of the capital.

It was the season of sacrifice, and the priests, in conformity with their duty, made the usual preparation for the performance of these rites.

The first festival which occurred, was the grand feast of flowers, a ceremony in which Malmiztic was the high officer and director, by usage, although the priests were much opposed to his authority, for under his command, all human sacrifice was restricted.

The morning's first faint streaks came over the purple east, with bright bars of gold, behind which, as in heaven's armory, a thousand lances of light were standing up on the eastern mountain tops, and resting against the blue walls of the skies. As the dawn opened, it revealed an enchanting picture, for all along the valley could be seen, for miles, multitudes of female figures in the grey glimpses of the morning, wending their way, with a burthen of flowers, towards the rich city of the Aztecs. They could be descried, in all directions, with their snowy dresses gathered gracefully around them, and their baskets of bright blossoms, in hand or on head, hurrying to join the throng who were already astir in and around the grounds of the great temple; and as morning advanced, the gathering multitude became immense in numbers, and the myriad of flowers which were collected filled the whole atmosphere with a delicious combination of exquisite odors, which were wafted gently around the temple grounds, by the first breath of the breeze, as it awakened, fresh and joyous, with the earliest glance of the golden sun upon the sleeping lake.

It was the merry month of May—the month that in every land hath a certain degree of beauty—but here, in the sweet vale of Mexico, it wore a hue of gorgeous splendor. The wild woods, in every direction, were living beds of flowers; and especially did the bright valley around Xochimilco (the field of flowers) blush with its million painted children of the sun, for plain and prairie, meadow and dale, mountain and moor, were now carpeted with a sheet of iris-hued bloom, which rolled down and rose in soft swells, like the waves of Tezcuco in a brilliant sunset, to the gentle gales that swept this Elysian valley.

As the multitude came swarming in from the surrounding country, they found many of the streets decorated with long boughs, which, over-arching the highway, formed one continuous bower, festooned with wreaths of blushing buds of every shade or dye.

When the stream of human beings, which poured into the city, had somewhat diminished in volume, and scattered itself throughout the mighty metropolis, the grand master of ceremonies began to collect the masses into a body, and forming them in an immense line, of a width nearly sufficient to fill the street, they began to move forward under the guidance of proper marshals, who were distinguished by white staves, surmounted by scarlet crests of long and graceful feathers. While they marched onward, sweet pipes played merry measures, and clear horns and clarions sent forth a cheerful blast, and, here and there, an atabal or trumpet would bray a consonant harmony to the hundred voices of the minor music; while, on the other hand, an occasional drum gave its dissonant beat, which marred the music of the less discordant instruments.

The high priest led the way in his scarlet robes, with his long plaited hair hanging behind him, and almost reaching the earth. Immediately after him followed the host of other priests clothed in habiliments resembling monkish gowns; and of these black-dressed agents of idolatry there were many hundreds.—Succeeding close, came the virgins of the temple, in garments of spotless purity, and many a dark and beautiful eye flashed from beneath a shroud-like robe of snow. As these passed on, the grand master of ceremonies next appeared—the mighty Malmiztic;

he wore, as usual, a loose mantle of sable, which fell around him in easy, ample folds ; upon his neck was a cape or collar of brilliants, which descended to a point upon his breast, glittering with superb and flashing jewels ; over these his raven beard fell in a mass, like a shining clue of silk ; upon his head was his high, two-sided hat, like a bishop's mitre, of deep crimson ; and from underneath its rim of gold, his black locks escaped in heavy, waving rolls upon his neck. As he moved forward there was a reverend majesty in his mien, and a calm dignity and beauty in his countenance, which thrilled the beholder with its god-like power, while it seemed to beam forth gentleness and goodness in every glance, notwithstanding the unsmiling gravity of the Toltec philosopher.

Immediately in the rear of Malmiztic, came the professors of the colleges and schools ; next, those learned in the law, and the officers of government, with the men of science, and the mathematicians ; and then, the great body of the astrologers and soothsayers ; after these followed the ranks of nobility, arrayed in the most superb and brilliant costume, and decorated with an infinite profusion of elegantly-wrought and costly jewelry. Over the palanquins, in which they were borne, upon the shoulders of their menials, were canopies of starry flowers, interwoven with much skill and beauty. Behind these, came the youths and maidens of the schools, bearing in their hands exquisite wreaths and bunches of the brightest blossoms, and ever and anon scattering the loose leaves of flowers upon the wayside as they passed.

This immense host, with their appropriate banners flying and music playing, moved through all the chief streets of the great capital, while, upon every hand, as they passed, showers of roses rained from the house-tops and windows upon their heads. Long garlands were chained across the thoroughfares, as they would enter streets which were completely embowered, and made into long halls, by banded boughs of trees, interlaced with leaves and bloom, which gave so dense and deep a shade as to render the passage dark at noontide.

Thus they marched on, followed by an innumerable host of citizens, and peasants from the neighboring provinces, traversing all the great highways of the city, and greeted in all quarters by

smiling faces and the leaves of a thousand loose blossoms. And thus they progressed, until they reached the farthest point of the island towards Iztapalapan, when, as the sun had begun to decline upon his western slope, they turned their footsteps back, and marched towards the grounds of the great temple, from whence they had issued forth in the morning; and as the procession approached the huge structure, and the great space enclosed within its giant wall, the vast multitude, at the command of Malmiztic, burst forth in a triumphal hymn :

FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS.

Let the might of song arise
 With its wondrous powers ;
 Let the pæan reach the skies
 For the Feast of Flowers.
 Tlaloc's* azure wings have swept
 O'er Tezcuco's waters :
 Night's wild fairies watch have kept
 O'er earth's blooming daughters.

Orizaba's brow of snow
 In the sunlight glitters ;
 O'er the level lake below
 The skimming swallow twitters ;
 Round the mountains blue, for miles,
 Bloom a thousand bowers,
 On Chalco's blushing margin smiles
 A waving world of flowers.

All the earth is glad and gay,
 Coatlicue† flinging,
 Rainbow blossoms o'er her way
 As she passeth singing ;
 Birds salute her as she flies,
 Where the ceiba towers,
 With their hymns our own shall rise—
 Hail thee, Queen of Flowers !

Life is but a mystic stream
 From youth's flowery fountain ;
 Winding through a land of dream,
 Lost in death's dark mountain;

* Tlaloc, god of the water.

† Coatlicue, the Aztec Flora.

Then strew the roses on the waves,
While gliding down life's river,
Ere we shall sweep into the caves
Where darkness dwelleth ever.

Then, chaplets weave for beauty's brow,
For valor, garlands glowing—
And to our God's high altar bow,
The meed of song bestowing;
And as the clouds of incense rise,
So shall our joyous voices,
'Till all the earth, the air, and skies,
With one wild chant rejoices!

When the procession was all assembled in the immense space enclosed by the great wall of the temple, which was paved with polished blocks of beautiful stone, the musicians were disposed in such a manner as to be heard in all parts of the place, by being stationed around upon stands, erected against the inner side of the wall, which wall was quaintly sculptured, and over its parapet ran immense serpents of stone.

The procession now formed itself in order for the grand national dance, in which the whole body, who were there collected, entered with great good will. Lines, crosses, and squares were formed within the great circle, which now stood ready for sports, upon the polished pavement.

The wand of Malmiztic was lifted aloft, as he stood within view of all upon the walls, and as the white rod which he held in his hand fell upon the black skirt of his flowing dress, the full burst of this whole body of musical instruments pealed forth their most thrilling and joyous strain. Instantaneously the entire host moved on in the rapid and merry mazes of the dance; infinite were the forms and figures into which they threw themselves, and intricate windings and convolutions were performed with such ease as plainly proved the people to be perfectly familiar with this delightful pastime.

Circles were formed of flowers laid in great wreaths upon the smooth flags, and within these, gay groups trod delightful measures. A never-ending variety pervaded their movements, forming one vast group of graceful and diverse action, throughout the whole of which the most perfect order was preserved; and one

general sense of exhilaration infused itself into every heart of the host, who for hours held their happy dance in the area of the great temple.

At length, Malmiztic and Guatemozin led Tecuiclipa into the centre of the court-yard, where there was a throne erected, covered with a myriad of many-colored honeysuckles, which were entwined around it, and made the place redolent with rich odors. Upon this throne the princess was seated. She was arrayed in a light, gauze-like garment of pure white, with bright blue bands and borders; upon her classically-moulded neck a chain of brilliants was clasped, which was the only ornament she wore, saving a single white rose, which was set in the midst of her raven ringlets, which disported in long waves upon her fair, round shoulders.

Over her head was a canopy of cloth of gold studded with silver stars, and four attendant females waved before her broad fans of feathers of brilliant and beautiful dyes.

The whole assembly went through the ceremony of laying, one after another, a flower at the foot of the throne; and then began an endless variety of games and athletic exercises, such as running, wrestling, and gymnastic movements upon poles, ladders, and bars, and perilous feats, such as standing upon the top of a mast of great height, with only sufficient room for the soles of the feet, while from such tree or mast, four or a greater number of ropes would be suspended, upon which the performers would seize, and, by making a run in rapid circles upon the earth, would move a wheel at the top, which would send them flying through the air, at the ends of the cords with an astonishing celerity.

Some were engaged in feats of muscular strength, as lifting or leaping, while a countless host of jugglers exhibited their various skill in legerdemain; and before the princess and the parties who surrounded her, a number of buffoons, in grotesque attire, called forth, from time to time, by their capers and conversation, loud outbursts of laughter and general merriment; many mountebanks were disguised like monkeys, and gravely would ape the scholars, the judges, and even the nobility; and facetious

harangues would be delivered to an imaginary king, wherein the severest satires upon government and the like, would be pronounced, clothed in the most comical conceits and laughable language; necromancers would point out, in the dark, polished faces of pieces of itzli, events which they foretold that time would reveal to the gaping and wondering crowds who stood around them.

Thus the hours of the evening were coming on, when the master of ceremonies announced that the feast stood in readiness for the guests, within the cells, of which there were hundreds in the great wall which enclosed the broad temple grounds. Immediately upon this, a general movement was observable, and in a few moments the multitude were busy in satisfying their well-sharpened appetites, by an abundance of various food, such as meats of animals, both wild and domestic, fish, fresh from the salt-tide of Tezcucó, or the clear sweet waters of Chalco, wild fowl and birds, of every description, together with deer, bears, and all character of forest game—furnishing, upon the whole, a repast savory and satisfactory to the thousand common people, artisans, laborers, and peasants, who partook of this feast at the public expense; but the higher orders and nobility did not participate in this meal, there being a feast in reserve for them in one of the great palaces in another quarter of the city.

When the repast was concluded, the whole body of the priesthood came forth in their robes, with flaming torches in their hands, and mounting the great stairway of the temple, marched to its broad, flat top, around which were sitting an immense number of beautiful vases of stone and Cholulan ware, filled with fragrant flowers, aromatic gums and spices, which, with dry fagots of odorous wood, burned with a delicious incense, as the priests touched their torches to them—while, once more, a triumphal chorus arose, as the yellow and blue fires blazed forth upon the evening air.

At this moment, Alvarado and his companions came galloping into the court-yard of the temple, with their proud horses decked out in their gayest caparisons, and their steel corselets shining in the sun.

"I command these ceremonies to cease!" cried he, to his interpreter, who immediately translated his words to the master of ceremonies.

"Who is he who dares to command here?" replied Malmiztic. "Upon what pretext and to what purpose comes this presumptuous mandate?"

"A commander of the cross of Christ!" hotly answered Alvarado; "by the authority of the Virgin and St. Iago, an enemy to idolatry, and a sworn knight in the service of heaven and Castile! a true but lowly champion of the church, pledged for the defence of virtue and the Catholic religion!"

"Then, get thee back," returned the Toltec, "for we have naught with thee or thine. In the fulfillment of our duties, and the performance of our ritual, we need neither instruction nor advice."

"Nay, but by the holy sepulchre of Jerusalem! ye shall be directed and restrained; for, know ye, dark-bearded infidel, that we have heard of your horrid purpose to commit a murder, a hideous and foul murder, of an innocent child, under the name and guise of sacrifice; and, in the name of the church and St. Dominick, I forbid the unholy act."

"Your bidding is useless and superfluous here," replied Malmiztic, "and were there an occasion for its exercise, I, in the name of the Aztec empire, by the authority of my office as master of these ceremonies, deny all your right of interference, and unhesitatingly pronounce your presence at this festival a presumptuous and intrusive act, which should be reprimanded rather than tolerated; and, by virtue of my station, I command you to depart in peace, and leave these people to their own control."

"Nay, thou brazen heathen," returned Alvarado, "but I *will* remain, and all my troop, and look well to it that no murder be done here, to satisfy thy host of demon gods."

"Man of the east," replied Malmiztic, "there is no purpose here of human sacrifice; this festival is guided by me, whose faith knows but a single God! I, who abhor, as much as thou canst, the dark and bloody act of human slaughter."

"Knavel!" shouted Alvarado, shaking his sword, and pointing

to the temple's top, "thou canst not deceive me with lies, for no sooner shall my back be turned, than yonder gleaming fires will blaze around the helpless form of a harmless innocent."

"Not so, Christian," answered Malmiztic, and his large, black eyes grew brilliant as he spoke, "there breathes not the being in Montezuma's realm, who can say that my sanction was ever had to sacrifice, save the offering of these flowers, the painted products of the teeming earth, a worthy boon to the pure Spirit whose eye gives them birth, even as he gives breath to his nobler creature, man. And, therefore, I say, to thee, man of the east, return, satisfied that while Malmiztic, the Toltec, sways the ceremony at this festival of flowers, no blood, but the juice of crimson blossoms, shall stain the altar-stone of yon temple, and no smoke shall ascend from its summit, save the rich incense of blooming plants, rising towards the blue home of blessed spirits. I bid thee, in all calmness, away! nor mar the worship or pastime of this people, lest, more suddenly than thou deemest, their ire be aroused, when thy troop shall pay the penalty of this presuming rashness. Be guided by me, who, neither liking thee, nor thy company, would yet not see thee fall victim to thine own temerity. To you, once more, I therefore say, depart!"

"Ho, friends!" exclaimed Alvarado, "behold the Aztec's daughter, yonder fair form, belongs to us, and not to this host of heathens; we must have her in charge; she escaped without the consent of Cortes, and it is our duty, as honest knights, to rescue her from the hands of these infidels. By my faith in St. James, he is no true cavalier who denies me his aid to regain this princess from captivity!"

So saying, Alvarado struck spurs to his steed, and attempted to dash forward to the throne, where Tecuiclipa was seated; but the stone of the pavement was so smoothly polished, as to render the footing of his horse very insecure, which Alvarado observing, leaped from his saddle, and threw the reins to a soldier, and drawing his sword, he strode on, clearing the crowd before him, up to the very spot where the princess sat, in the place of state, and, turning suddenly towards his interpreter, he exclaimed:

“Tell this mob of godless infidels, that I claim this maid, in the name of her father, Montezuma, the emperor of Mexico, and by the command of Don Hernando Cortes, general of his majesty, Charles V, of Spain, and insist upon taking her into my charge, into the care and custody of her father.”

“And I,” said Guatemozin, stepping boldly up to the other side of the throne, “claim her, in the name of the Aztec nation—and by the holy law of the heart! I know no claim of kindred outweighing my right of affection; I know no command of a captive king; and as for lords of stranger lands, the very echoes of their voices fall powerless and dead in the heart of this free city and empire.”

“Back, heathen dog!” cried Alvarado, “or by the blood of the martyrs, I’ll make a ghost of thee, ere a star could shoot out of sight!” and with these words, he mounted his steps of the throne to seize the princess.

“Christian, hold!” shouted Guatemozin, and his wild, dark eyes darted forth electric fire, “lay not your hands upon the form which sits in that throne, or I swear, by the spectre that haunts the caverns of Popocatepetl, I will follow thee to the grave, but that I’ll pluck her back!”

“Away hound!” roared the infuriate Spaniard, “this maiden is the affianced bride of Cuiclahua, prince of Iztapalapan, and thou hast no claim upon her. I charge thee again, to beware how thou opposest the will of my commander, and the sovereign of this empire. Advance to thwart my purpose, and thou shalt pay dearly for thy temerity.”

“Thinkest thou I fear thy vain boasting?” said Guatemozin, advancing, as Alvarado laid his mailed left hand upon the shoulder of the princess; “nay, I dread thee not—I defy thee! hold off thy touch from that maiden’s form!”

“Callest thou Alvarado a vain boaster?” said the haughty Spaniard, drawing himself proudly back, and grasping the hilt of his sword, with a vice-like firmness. “Thou defiest me, dost thou, dog!—then take *that* for thy defiance, thou godless heathen!”

And with these words, Alvarado leaped with a tremendous bound towards Guatemozin, and dealt a blow with his well-

tempered Toledo at his head, which would have needed no following stroke, had it not been caught, as it descended almost upon the crest of the young Aztec, by the lightning blade of Malmiztic, which, interposing swift as a sunbeam, made the keen sword of the Spaniard ring loud, as it went whirling upward in the air, far above his head, and fell at some distance upon the stone pavement ; but quick as the flash of an eye, Alvarado sprang forward and seized Guatemozin by the throat, with both hands, with a hold like the grasp of an eagle's talons ; but, as suddenly, the young prince, with a powerful blow, dealt even against the polished plate of his breast, compelled the Spaniard to relax a trifle, when, swift as thought, Guatemozin struck him upon the side of his helmet, such a stroke as made the ears of Alvarado ring, as he reeled round and round like one bewildered, and was about to fall, when one of his associates rushed in and supported him, and Malmiztic, laying his hands upon Guatemozin, withheld him from rushing upon the Christians, as they bore their leader off.

All this was brief work ; but the excitement of the multitude had become terrible ; and as the Spaniards retired, shouts, hisses, and huzzas, were given in every direction. By this time, Alvarado was so far recovered, as to remount his horse, and as he heard the revilings and mockeries of the great mass of the Mexicans, he threw open his bonnet of mail, and turning half way round on his horse, he looked back with a burning face and an eye like fire, and, clenching his teeth and hand, he shook the latter menacingly at the mob, and with his troop rode slowly away from the temple.

Loud bursts of derisive laughter, now came from the crowd, and Guatemozin and Tecuiclipa turned to thank Malmiztic for his timely aid, but in the thick confusion of the vast multitude, the Toltec could nowhere be discovered.

The nobility proceeded to their homes to prepare the grand evening feast. Most of the people dispersed, but yet a body followed Alvarado and his companions, in the distance, with hootings and yells, to their quarters, and even kept up mockeries and howlings around the ancient palace until after sunset.

But, although the fiery souled Alvarado burned for vengeance, yet he restrained his wrath, and suffered no one to go without the quarters, save the sentinels upon duty, and when the night came on, the mob dispersed to different parts of the city—and Pedro de Alvarado was busily engaged in making a silent preparation for returning the indignity which had been offered to him, with a fearful rate of interest.

CHAPTER XIX.

A GREAT feast was held in one of those superb palaces, by the lake, whose architecture, combining solidity with beauty, gave the Aztec capital the right to claim the title which the conquerors conferred upon it, of the "Venice of the West."

It was night, a soft, sweet night, when southern gales, coming over beds of flowers, filled the frame with an unspeakable, quiet, dreamy delight, producing a luxurious state of beatitude, from which, as from a pleasant vision of the night, one would not wish to be awakened, but would rather be content that such a scene, and such sensations of bliss, would last forever.

The yellow moon had just lifted her golden horns over the shadowy spires of the city of Tezcucó, to the east, and sent over the thousand turrets of its towers, a broad river of light, which seemed to pour down from the azure fields of heaven and spread itself in one wide sheet of gold, as it was emptied into, and blent with, the blue waves of the lake.

The moonlight fell upon these palace walls of the blood-red stone Tezontli, and upon the other side, half lost in shadows, was a sweet little grove, filled with spicy flowers. Finely-carved statuary stood, here and there, under the darkness of the trees, or the white figures were half revealed by wandering beams of the moon.

In this splendid palace, a more magnificent than which stood not in the Tezcucan vale, were assembled all the flower of the Aztec nobility, and such a banquet was prepared as was in keeping with the high character of the goodly company. The decoration of the festal hall was suited to the season and occasion, it being with blossom-bearing boughs, and festoons of fragrant flowers. Tapers and torches of odorous wax and gums were

burning ; and from vases, whose crystal sides were painted with the most brilliant dyes, issued gentle streams of sweet, rich incense, whose soft, thin smoke, curling gently up to the painted ceiling, floated quietly out at the open windows.

Grave matters of state were, for a time, discussed, but as the purple juice of the aloe began to flow more freely, things grew more hopeful in hue, and all seemed bent upon devoting the hour to happiness and hope.

The many torches upon the wall gleamed upon the rarest viands, in dishes, whose solid surfaces, flashing in the light, plainly bespoke them to be of the purest gold ; and goblets of Cholulan crystal, of the brightest colors and the purest transparency, glowed with the sparkling octli—the delicious wine of the Aztecs, that blushed with the bright blood of the cochineal, as the noble guests raised them, from time to time, to their lips.

Many were the beautiful speeches which the guests would deliver upon the ancient and time-honored custom of the Feast of Flowers. Every one seemed, by the beauty of the theme, to become an orator by inspiration, and the countless cups would rise when some patriotic outburst of feeling would be expressed, or some touch of sentiment ran, like an electric spark, from soul to soul, and brightened each countenance as it passed.

The merry goblets clinked ; the purple stream poured forth its volume plenteously ; the spirit of mirth laughed in the banquet-hall, and a thousand voices echoed back an answer.

Right joyously was the night progressing, for the jest was upon every tongue, and a smile played upon every lip ; each face seemed the mirror which reflected gladness in its neighbor's eyes ; and then, when matters of state and ceremonies of religion had long passed, the theme of love came in and lighted the whole board—which love, so blent with flowers, poetry, music, and woman, was the vital principle of the feast which they celebrated ; and when the happy jests of the humorous were hushed, few were the ears which did not relish, and few the hands which did not applaud, the love song, which all insisted that Guatemozin should sing, as no other tongue could in the whole empire.

SONG.

When youth first awakens to visions of bliss,
 And feeling's bright fount in the bosom is pure;
 When the lip first hath felt the deep thrill of a kiss,
 'Tis the height of all joy that the soul can endure—
 Like the rainbow which spans the bright arch of the skies,
 It lives but an hour—it fades—and it dies.

The air-plant, which hangs from the top of the trees,
 Like Love's clue of gold, as it clings to the heart,
 Is kissed by the sunshine and wooed by the breeze;
 But dies in a moment if ever they part.
 So love from love parted, long lost, ever flies,
 As a bird seeks its mate through an ocean of skies.

From the chrysalis heart, Love opens his wings,
 And glides like a halcyon o'er summery tides;
 But his iris-hued feathers are delicate things,
 And a wave will destroy them as onward he glides,
 As a bubble in sunshine, a rainbow in dyes
 Goes down in the waters to never more rise.

Some flowers may wither, but others will spring,
 Bright stars may rush out, but as bright will appear;
 The song-bird may flee, but another will sing
 The sky be o'ercast, but it will yet be clear;
 The sun goeth down, but again it will rise—
 But Love, like the aloe, blooms once—and it dies.

Its flowers come forth in sunshine or gloom,
 And the light of its life is the magic of eyes;
 It gently unfolds, or it bursts into bloom,
 A flower of earth, but with heavenly ties—
 Not the might of the strong, nor the words of the wise,
 Could give it existence, or life, when it dies.

'Tis the aloe that blooms but once in the soul!
 The cynosure light in the heart that doth burn;
 If it shoots from its place, like the star from the pole,
 It never again to its home will return.
 In the night of the soul new stars may arise—
 But Love, like the aloe, blooms once—and it dies.

Again the outburst of joy pealed forth upon the night, and the
 clink of flashing goblets resounded through the mighty hall.
 Bright were the red and yellow torches which burned against the

flowered wall, and bright were the dark eyes of the merry host, who, lost in the enjoyment of the hour, forgot, for a time, that a foe lay in the heart of their happy home.

The night wore on, but mirth left not the banquet-board, each from the other seemed to catch a gladness of spirit. The poet spake his poem, and the orator his speech; the buffoon and clown gave their humors, at which the host would make the walls ring with laughter. It was a joyous feast—the stream of happiness was full, and flowed on in its smooth course, covered with flowers, without a gale to ruffle its surface, or a cloud to darken its light.

“Friends,” said Guatemozin, “I would we had here, to-night, my friend Malmiztic; I would be content that he should rail against the bright blood of the aloe, and praise the flood of the fountain, if I might now thank him for the timely sweep of his bright blade, which saved me from the death-stroke of the savage Spaniard. Is there in this assembly any one who can tell aught of him, since he left us so suddenly, by the great temple?”

To this question an old man started up from the farther corner of the room, his head was covered with long locks of snowy hair, which fell in fleecy folds upon his time-marked brow, and flowed down behind on his dusky shoulders—between his browned skin, and his locks of snow, there was a strange, but by no means unpleasant contrast—while from his wrinkled face, his bright black eyes beamed forth with a gentleness which touched, while it won the beholder, by their mild, soft beauty. He rose tremblingly, and bowing low, said in a subdued sweet voice, as he supported himself upon a white staff, entwined with roses:

“May thy servant speak, my lord Guatemozin?”

“Gladly,” answered the prince, “will we hear thee, reverend man, none are more welcome to our feast than the ancient minstrel of Montezuma. Whence comest thou, Octo, or canst thou say aught of Malmiztic?”

“My lord, Octo is now a messenger from his emperor’s servant, the Toltec, as he bids me say, and comes to say beside, that Malmiztic would be pardoned for not being with those to-night, who celebrate the yearly feast of Flowers—his heart is heavy, and he would not mar the enjoyment of the company by a shadowed face, where all should gleam with gladness—and lastly, oh! great

lords! thy humble minstrel, old and grey, comes from the dark dungeon of his loved but lost master, the young prince, Cacama!" At these words a cloud of gloom shaded every countenance. "In his dungeon depths he said to me, 'Octo, my friend of happier hours, if my memory has not lost its light in this living sepulchre, it should now be near the Festival of Flowers.'

"'My lord,'" I answered, 'even this day do they march in procession, and sing their chant of triumph.'

"'Then,' replied he, 'go, good minstrel, seek the festal hall of my kindred and companions, and say that the captive, even from his cell, sends them his greeting and love, and say that Cacama would ask to put in his pledge in their glowing goblets of octli—the last tear for Tezcuco!—and ask that you may sing for him his farewell song, and bid adieu to the Aztec empire in his name. Say this to them, Octo, and if I am not lost to them already, they will hear thee, even for the sake of my memory in better and brighter days.' Thus spake he, my lords, and a smile played upon his wan face, as he gave me from his thin hands, upon a leaf of aloe, words which he had traced as his last lines; and now, my lord, shall thy humble servitor sing?"

When the minstrel had ceased speaking, half the eyes in the hall were overflowing, or stood brimful of tears.

"Gentle minstrel," said Guatemozin, to whom Octo had addressed himself, "though our griefs weigh down our hearts with sad remembrances, yet will we hear thee, with that melancholy pleasure which is likest to joy's wildest, deepest ecstasy, and even from the mournful recollections which must arise from association, from the measure will we gather gladness, even as the bee draws his sweet draught from the bitterest blossoms. Therefore, awaken the melody, my gentle minstrel, as I have heard thee plaintively in days gone by."

The old man, with his staff in hand, tremblingly tottered across the floor, to where an instrument like a harp stood, half hid behind the arras, and having moved it forwards, gently swept his faltering fingers over the chords—like the touch of an enchanter, those feeble hands woke a strain of wondrous wildness and beauty, a fairy prelude, which was fitted to the wizard voice which followed, low, but unbroken in its wild and magical rhapsody.

S O N G.

The spirit of change is ever, ever flying,
 Like an angel o'er the ocean and the earth ;
 New things come forth, while olden ones are dying,
 The dead now sleep, where life but late had birth.
 Eve follows morn, and darkness swallows day ;
 And midst the gloom a mystic voice doth say—
 Passing away, passing away.

The Spring's bright skies and greenwood leaves are fleeting ;
 The golden Summer droops her yellow head ;
 Brown Fall with failing step is fast retreating,
 And frozen Winter in his shroud lies dead.
 December chills the diamond tears of May,
 And whispering winds forever seem to say—
 Passing away, passing away.

The wild Centzontli* sings within his bower,
 'Till moonlight's gold is gathered up by Gloom ;
 The woodbine droops and folds its fairy flower,
 And dies in darkness, midst its own perfume.
 Thus life's bright blossoms leaf by leaf decay,
 When Fate throws shadows o'er Hope's moonlit way—
 Silence doth say, passing away.

The mark of time o'er youth's bright brow is stealing ;
 The eye grows dim which beamed of late so clear ;
 The ice of age congeals the fount of feeling,
 The heart's dry well o'erflows not with a tear.
 Where life's joys danced like fairy and fay,
 Move shadows and phantoms dismal and grey—
 Passing away, passing away.

Farewell to earth ! for life is almost failing,
 My country lost ! my friends and freedom fled ;
 One word of sad, but yet of sweet bewailing,
 Tezcuco ! bless thee ! bless thee, when I'm dead !
 One sigh, one tear, before I'm turned to clay ;
 Life is a dream—Earth, a vision of day—
 Passing away, passing away.

The minstrel ceased, and again bowing low, lifted his light instrument, and stepped slow and tremblingly away. The joy of the feast had fled—the one tear which fell from the old man's cheek as he departed, embittered the full flowing stream of their happiness.

*Mocking-Bird.

The song had ceased, and silence for a space pervaded the great hall. Suddenly a voice was heard, whose tones, though they came through the window, low and indistinct, yet the strange manner in which the dark head which uttered them, appeared at the window, and then vanished, had something terribly startling in it. In a moment more, it again cried louder than before,

"Guatemozin, fly! beware! beware! the foe is at hand!"

Instantly figures of the banqueters stood in the palace portal, the tall columns threw their long black shadows upon the ground, white with the moonlight, but no form of life was visible, nor a sound heard, save from the leafy grove hard by, the wild mocking-bird's magical notes broke the deep stillness of the night.—The revellers again turned to the banquet, and one exclaimed,

"By the yellow horns of the moon! this is a good jest; some knave in his cups has thought to frighten us."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared his companions, in a loud burst of laughter.

"Ho!" cried another, who had not left his seat from fear, and was known as an arrant coward, "Ho! I feared it not; I knew it was some boy's trick, to try our courage—a brave and seasonable jest."

"Tush!" said another, "there was no noise, or if there was it was but the cry of a night-hawk, as it passed."

"Nay," said twenty voices at once, in reply, "the voice was that of a man."

"I saw the figure, as I live," said one, who sat near Guatemozin. This remark brought forth an ironical outburst of laughter from a nobleman, much affected with wine, who sat upon the opposite side of the board, who questioned, mockingly,

"Had it horns, and great fiery eyes? then I lay my brightest emerald it were a terrible owl, with a voice loud enough to frighten an army of Tlascalans."

"Nay," answered the other, "I will swear that I saw the face and form of a man, and I will wager thee this diamond in my bracelet, to thy emerald, that thou darest not walk thrice around the palace grounds alone."

"It is a wager," exclaimed the other, eagerly, as he strode fearlessly out of the room, and stepped briskly down the steps

of the portal, and cast his eyes around the palace, in every direction. The night breeze scarcely moved the thick leaves of the fig-trees, and the moonlight shed its pearly sheen upon every object in its line ; but the eye of the seeker could see no object like life, save the statues, which stood cold and stony, in various parts of the garden and groves. As he pursued his way around the palace, he fancied he heard a sound ; his heart beat fast, as he listened fearfully ; but it came no more, and he walked onward ; but again he was startled by a movement in some thick-leaved bushes at his side, but still he paused not, but moved onward, trying to quiet himself under the conjecture that it might be a bird, or some small beast of prey, prowling through the thicket. He had nearly made the circuit of the palace, when suddenly he saw a bright steel bonnet flash behind a giant cactus, and by a slight movement, the Aztec saw the full figure of a man in mail standing close behind the great green plant. The moonbeams blazed on the burnished harness, and a chill of terror ran through the Aztec's frame, as he strode swiftly onward, to reach the rear portal of the palace ; but now, on every side, his eye scanned the aloe and cacti trees in his way, and his heart almost froze with horror as he beheld, hid behind them, the black spectres of iron-clad men. With hasty and trembling footsteps he fled, and mounting the marble stairway, rushed into the door of the great hall of the palace. He entered the door where the guests were assembled, with his brown face blanched and wan, and a wild look of horror in his eye. He tottered forwards toward the festal board ; his limbs quaked under him, and a ghastly pallor overspread his whole countenance. The host of guests rose in an instant, as a single man, all petrified with astonishment at the appearance of their companion ; but the entire body were struck into a speechless silence, and became fixed as marble statues, when they heard a clarion voice cry through the fearful silence of the night,

“ Santiago ! Santiago ! and death to them ! Down with the heathen dogs ! Guard every gap, and upon them ! for the love of Christ and the Virgin ! ”

Scarce had this strange cry been heard, when the reeds which covered the windows were torn aside, and the bearded faces of

Alvarado and his soldiers were seen, with the stern gaze of death in their iron visages.

“For victory and for vengeance! fire upon them!” shouted the same voice, and in another instant muskets were pointed in at every window, and the red blaze burst forth, peal after peal, and sent death and confusion through the terrified throng.

“Spare not a cursed infidel!” the fierce Spaniard cried, as he leaped through the window to the inside.

“In, men! in! and for God and St. James’ sake, hew down the dogs to your feet!” and he drew his ponderous blade, and swept it right and left before him, as the unarmed crowd fell back, while in at every window leaped, one after another, his terrible followers. Presently those Aztecs who were armed, rushed boldly forward, while the defenceless retreated under their protection. Blade met blade, as the Aztecs, stumbling over the bodies of their companions who had fallen by the fire of musketry, rushed against the iron-handed Christians; but the maquahuitls, and dark glassy swords of itzli were shattered in atoms as the heavy blades of steel fell upon them and the heads of the fated Aztecs.

Shrieks, groans and death-struggles filled the apartment with a horrid and stunning noise—but loud above the appalling cries of the dying and the wounded, the trumpet-tones of Alvarado’s voice, shouting to his bloody troop, was heard, and high above the din and uproar of cries and clamor, rang forth the battle-shout of “Santiago! Santiago!” and “Spare not!”

The storm raged fearfully; the Aztec numbers were only in each other’s way, while the small fiery band of Christians came upon them with the ferocity of famished tigers. The blood grew deep on the banquet-floor, and the spirit of resistance, upon the part of the Aztecs, was fast flagging, when Guatemozin, rushing forward, roared forth with a voice of thunder, in the battle-storm, as he wheeled his burnished blade of bright black itzli over his head,

“On! on! and die like men!—fly not, Aztecs! your gods, your wives, your babes call on you to fall in your footsteps for Mexitli and Mexico!”

With these words his associates turned like a recoiling billow,

and the carnage of battle became bloody and terrible, as they clashed hand to hand. On came the Aztec throng with their uplifted weapons, and a desperation which arises from being driven to an extremity—the fierce return which the bear at bay makes, when he has retreated until he can get no farther, but turns upon his assailants, and becomes the attacking party, instead of the attacked.

Guatemozin strode forward with his ponderous blade of the bright black flint, sweeping all before him. The Christians recoiled before this sudden and terrible assault, but fought fiercely as they fell back; and woe to the Aztec whose hardy impetuosity hurried him into the crowd of Christians, as step by step they retired.

Still the Aztec nobles, encouraged by the desperate valor of Guatemozin, pressed forward, and the moment seemed to promise an opening for their escape from the confines of the palaces, and with this hope, a stronger push was made for the portals. As they advanced, they seemed to gather energy and power, and the prowess of their leader inspired them with an enthusiasm to follow in his footsteps, as he charged onward.

The Christians were now almost crushed by the crowd, and becoming confused in their retreat, when suddenly Alvarado, disengaging himself from a hand-to-hand conflict, perceived that his host were rolled back like the waves of desert sands before the fiery breath of the simoon, but as soon as his keen eye caught a glimpse of his retiring troops, he burst forth with a stentorian shout, and cried,

“Men! Christians! Spaniards! turn for the honor of Castile, and the love of the Virgin! Hurl back the assault of the foe in their teeth! strike home to each heathen heart! follow me!” and with these words, he leaped amidst the brown host of infuriate Mexicans, and with his single sword, stayed the rushing progress of the enemy. Desperately he dealt about him, and before his blade form after form reeled right and left, until his companions, inspirited by his voice and valorous example, made a rapid and vigorous charge to reach the spot where Alvarado was now stoutly forcing his way in the face of the Aztecs, who, checked by this sudden rebuff, were, in an instant more, compelled to

shrink from the irresistible violence with which the Christian party once more advanced, in their small but compact and unflinching band. The assault was terrific; the brittle-blades of itzli flew like glass before the fell swoops of the steel-armed enemy. The crimson floods flowed fast from the bodies of the fallen Aztecs, but their assailants knew no check or stay, and so they followed, step by step, their impetuous charge, until the conflict became carnage, and fight was turned to flight and pursuit. In vain Guatemozin called upon them to rally, but neither word of encouragement or reproach could bring the overpowered Aztecs again to the attack. In vain he pleaded and entreated them to make one more stern effort to check the career of the Christians; but resistance had become futile, and the polished floor of the huge hall was slippery with gore.

"Shame! shame!" shouted Guatemozin, "out upon the coward slave that flies! go! recreants go! ye white-hearted waterfowl, frightened by ravens and vultures. What! do ye fly? away then, and leave the battle to me; and you, ye white wolves," continued he, turning to the Christians, while his bright black eyes burned with a fierce and brilliant lustre, and his tall, stately figure seemed to tower more than ever above the crowd, "if ye are howling and hungry for your prey, come on! One victim stands ready to be sacrificed, but his death shall cost ye dearly."

"Make way!" cried Alvarado, and the soldiers opened the way as he sprang forward towards Guatemozin, with his dripping sword clutched in his mail-gloved hand. The Aztec prince stood moveless as a statue; his right arm thrown somewhat behind him, almost hiding his ponderous blade of polished itzli, which he held. Alvarado's face gleamed with a wild joy, as he gazed upon the noble form of his antagonist, and he smiled with a look of admiration, wholly devoid of all sense of fear, and his heated blood brooked no thought of anything but success.

"Yield thee!" exclaimed Alvarado, in the full, clear tones of the Mexican tongue, "yield thee, infidel, or die!"

"Then death!" answered Guatemozin.

"Ha! so bold, my daring, dark-eyed heathen, then have at you!" and with these words he gave a rapid and skillful stroke

at the Aztec, which the latter parried with as much skill and grace. Again the Spaniard struck with more vigor than before, and the issue of the blow might have proved fatal, had not Guatemozin quick as the flash of an eye, whirled his black falchion around his head, and sweeping downward, it caught the coming sword of the Spaniard, and struck it out of the holder's grasp, sending it whirling across the great hall; but the blow which disarmed Alvarado, also left the Aztec weaponless, for so severe was the shock of the tremendous stroke, that the thick, but brittle obsidian clashing against the well-tempered steel, was shattered into fragments, and fell scattered like broken glass upon the floor. At this moment a dozen brawny Aztecs sprang forward to despatch the defenceless Christian, with their maquahuittls drawn, and their fierce countenances red and glowing with savage ferocity, and a handful of Christians simultaneously moved rapidly towards their leader, who cried,

"Off! off! by Santiago, I will not have a man of you come to my rescue."

"Back!" said Guatemozin sternly to the advancing Aztecs, "if you cannot strike for yourselves and country, I ask not your aid—away with you, and save yourselves by flight!"

Scarce had he uttered these words, when, like a crouching tiger, Alvarado sprang upon him, and clutched him with an iron grasp by the throat, with his left hand, and with his right seized upon the long black locks of Guatemozin, and with a violent jerk brought the latter to his knees. A wild cheer burst from the excited Christians, as they crowded nearer the combatants, but quicker than the flight of a meteor, the powerful prince sprang to his feet, and like a condor darting upon his prey and closing his talons, he leaped up, and seizing Alvarado with both hands, swung him aloft as if he were an infant, and with the strength of an angered giant he hurled him away from him into the midst of the crowd of Christians who were thronging around.

"Death to the heathen Titan! down with the monster!" shrieked Alvarado, as he fell, and instantly his cavalier companions turned upon Guatemozin, who rushing upon the foremost soldier, received a sword thrust through his arm, but wrenching the weapon from the grasp of his opponent, Guatemozin began

making those fearful and deadly strokes which nothing but hopeless desperation can give. Hotly they pressed upon him; but as he retreated, he dealt his blows with an accuracy and power which amazed even those men whose lives had been spent in Castile. Step by step as he fell back, fire flew from the clashing swords, and those who rushed upon him were forced to recoil from his desperate defence. The great hall now presented a most singular scene, the atmosphere was filled with thick smoke of powder from the firing of guns, and through this sulphurous cloud the yellow and red glare of the torches burned mistily and strange. In one end of the apartment the Aztecs crouched like a flock of terrified sheep, while the whole palace floor was one red sea of slaughter, through which the Christians came crowding on after a single warrior—a noble and gallant creature, whose endurance seemed supernatural, and whose capture was likely to cost more Christian blood than the slaying of fifty others. But the power of the Spanish soldiery was uncontrollable; they moved forward as an unbroken bed of lava, and now they had the Aztecs entirely penned and imprisoned before them.

“God of my fathers, befriend me now!” exclaimed Guatemozin, as he looked despairingly around, and saw the utter hopelessness of escape.

“Seize him! slay him!” roared Alvarado to his companions; and as if new fire had been added to their boiling blood, the cavaliers in a body charged upon Guatemozin; loud was the clang of swords, and in the midst of the wild confusion of the conflict the dark and towering head of Guatemozin was seen to fall, and the body go down upon the crowd who crouched in one corner. At this instant a sight appeared, and sounds were heard which chilled the Spaniards with horror. A heavy, powerful figure approached, coming through the back portal, clad in black. Upon his head was a brazen copper casque, and following him were two men with long lances or pikes, with heavy, sharp-pointed heads. The athletic form in black burst full into the midst of the Christian troop, and with a Herculean might, and a sword like a blazing meteor, he cut his way through the mass, who parted like the yielding waters before a vessel’s prow; those who stepped out to oppose him, in an instant were rolled

back, or dropped right and left, as if stricken by lightning. On he strode with his scythe-like sword, mowing a clear passage before him, and his black lustrous eyes gleaming under the rim of his bronze helmet, with a fearful intensity. As the soldiery opened before him, he beheld a fiery Spaniard with a grizzled beard, dragging Guatemozin by the hair with one hand, and the other uplifted to drive a dagger to his heart; quicker than a hawk could dart upon a fish, the blazing blade of the dark-robed giant descended upon the arm of the grey beard who held the dagger aloft, and that arm fell lifeless and severed by his side. At this moment the two pikemen who entered with the sable stranger, had reached the head of the hall, one on each side of the room, when suddenly wheeling about, they swept down, one after another, the blazing torches, from where they were elevated along the wall, and the vases of incense which burned upon the tops of the great urns around the apartment; with an almost flying speed they flew from one to another, and with their long pikes struck them from their places, and instantaneously the whole vast hall was black as night, and the entire host were left in confusion and darkness, without a ray, save where a grey gleam of the moon's light came struggling through the reed-latticed windows, into the gloom-filled and smoky hall.

It was a wondrous and fearful scene; groans and prayers were commingled with loud shouts and stunning cries, and the bewildered soldiers were groping about blindly, and calling aloud to each other. A Babel-like confusion followed, and Alvarado fruitlessly essayed to make himself heard, as he shouted to his soldiers to guard the door-way, and pursue the sable stranger until they overtook him. But fear, which is the offspring of darkness, withheld the Spaniards from rushing upon their foe, who had lifted the fallen Guatemozin from the floor, and half supporting, half carrying him, hurried at a rapid pace towards the great doorway, at which he had entered. Right through the midst of the host he made his way unharmed, and no one struck, for friend was as likely to fall as foe, by indiscriminate blows hazarded at random in the impalpable gloom; but a soldier followed fast upon their footsteps, and had almost overtaken them at the base of the great stairway, when suddenly the flying

parties disappeared in the thick tangled groves, and although a stream of Spaniards poured out at the portal almost instantaneously, no sign of the fugitives could be discovered; and vain was the search through garden and grove, by lake-shore, and canal.

In a few moments Alvarado had dispatched his troops in every direction by which he deemed it possible for the others to have escaped. The few Aztecs who remained, now taking advantage of the unguarded absence of their terrible enemies, rushed out of the palace, and scattered themselves throughout the ambush of the garden, and in every place which seemed to promise protection. Some of the unfortunate creatures, in their wild flight, ran full upon the Spanish soldiers, who despatched them instantly, without mercy.

Thus satiated with blood, to his heart's content, the fiery Alvarado, having wreaked the full measure of his vengeance upon the heads of the Aztecs, turned with the first silver streaks of the morning, towards the palace of Axajacatl.

CHAPTER XX.

IN the Great Cavern, before which the giant palm-trees stood, and whose mouth was overhung with clustering curtains of honeysuckles, upon the ledge of the mountain precipice of rocks opposite the hill of Tezcozinco, were five persons. Two were females, and of a bearing and beauty truly imperial. Though the elder had more dignity, and a greater loftiness of manner, the younger was favored by nature with a softer and more fairy-like loveliness. Her every limb was of surpassing symmetry, and her countenance of that angelic mould and exquisite expression, which blended heavenly serenity with a sunny glimpse of human joyousness. Through the rich, dark hazle depths of her eyes, came a light which fascinated the beholder with a magical attraction. Opposite to these two persons, who will be recognised as the princesses Tecuiclipa and Tecalco, sat in the same beautiful apartment in the Cavern, the majestic figure of Malmiztic, and kneeling upon a heavily-fringed cushion at his feet, was the small, quaint-shaped dwarf, with his classically moulded head, and nut-brown locks, nestling in soft folds upon his white brow and neck, looking up in his master's face, with an intelligent gaze of mingled awe, respect and love.

Upon a rich couch close at hand, lay Guatemozin ; his noble and beautifully-chiselled features were relaxed, and his complexion pale. Over his large black eyes a languid softness was spread, which gave a dreamy expression, which evidently bespoke recent suffering. His left arm was bound across his broad chest, and carefully covered with bandages of soft cotton. The drapery of the couch was gorgeous, consisting of light and elegantly-embroidered pieces of stuff, formed of the fine fibres of the aloe, dressed with much skill, and ornamented with embossed flowers.

Malmiztic and Tecalco wandered away through the long halls or chambers of the cavern, which were lighted by beautiful lamps of shining silver, stationed upon the ledges of the rocky wall. At a considerable distance behind them, the fair-faced dwarf came leisurely along, strumming upon the chords of a light musical instrument, a sweet, melodious, but plaintive air.

Tecuiclipó, who remained, approached the couch of the wounded Guatemozin, and seating herself at his side, smoothed back, with her fair hand, the dark locks from his pale brow, as she said,

“The fever has passed, Guatemozin, and praised be the spirit of the gods that hath restored thee. Oh! Guatemozin, my heart had almost feared to hope, when I saw thee breathing hard and heavy, and thy dark eyes glazed over with a misty film—when I whispered to thee, and thy lips, though they moved, returned no answer to my anxious ear.”

“Yes,” replied the other, “I heard thee, Tecuiclipó, as in a dream, and fain would have spoken, for I felt amidst this strange dream, that the hand of death was upon me heavily. I strove to give thee a few fond words, the last I deemed that were left to me upon the earth, but I could not utter them; in vain I strove to breathe those few words, and oh! Tecuiclipó, it was terrible to part without one farewell, for I felt that if thou wouldst promise to meet me in another sphere, that I could die happy. But all in vain; one strange, vague vision of darkness overspread my mind, and all was gloom and oblivion. I knew no feeling of good or ill; forgetfulness closed out the world from my view, and one after another, every object of my earthly remembrance faded away from my sight, until there was nothing but one dark, oblivious cloud which shrouded everything. It seemed that my very soul had fallen into a deep sleep, and there was not even a dream or a thought, all was a blank, saving amidst this night of shadows, one figure, like a pale-winged angel of light, hovered over my body, and kept its constant vigil there, like a mist-shrouded star, palely peering through the sable cover of night, and that angel form, Tecuiclipó, was thine! and oh! as I gazed upon it, a soothing sensation stole over me, and thought by thought came back, until full consciousness was restored; but yet I could but see thee as that angel still—still was there that

soft, sweet light hovering about thee, and that gentle look of love in thine eyes, which made thee seem some fair visitant from another and elysian world. But now, sweet angel of my heart, that I am granted the bliss to speak to thee, and say how I have thanked thee a thousand times for those looks of love and light, I feel that I could thus breathe out my blessing, and be content to die—yes! be content to sink once more into that strange sphere of shadows and darkness, that night of forgetfulness, cheered with the hope, that far beyond that shrouded region, I should meet thee in a land where animated souls should meet to know no separation.

“Nay,” said the princess, “thou shouldst not think that I alone have watched thee in this hour of thy affliction. Malmiztic hath been the ministering angel, whose guardian eye and skillful knowledge of salutary medicaments, hath snatched thee from the very verge of death, and placed thee once more among the living beings of the earth. Yes, Guatemozin, thou shalt live, and thou shalt be loved as never mortal man was loved. I will cling closer to thee than the shell imbedded in the rock. Oh! I had never dreamed how I loved, yea, how I adored thee, until thou wert almost lost; but now again I have thee, and thou art mine forever!” With these words, Tecuiclipa bent over Guatemozin, and impressed upon his pale lips a fervid kiss.

“Heavens! what a thought is this!” exclaimed he, half rising upon the arm which was free, “what do I remember! there is a gulf between us forever—a fearful truth breaks upon me—thou art another’s!—Cuitlahua is thy lord; thou art his bride, the wife of his faith and his bosom; bound to him by a pledge registered in the bright mansions of the moon, and guarded by the seven angels who keep watch over the records of the human heart.”

“Guatemozin, rest quiet,” said the princess; “rememberest thou not that Cuitlahua is now a prisoner confined in the deep dungeons of the ancient castle, by the stranger foe who fill our capital. Of late I bribed his keeper with heavy bars of gold, to lead me to his cell. I saw him, but oh! how changed! and he whom I had never loved, now moved me with compassion to behold. Irons and darkness had not broken his spirit; he was still

proud, unyielding, and defiant towards his foes. He was gaunt and thin, but his wild eyes were full of fire, as he spake to me, and said,

“‘Tecuiclipó, thou hast never loved me. When I won thee from thy father, as my bride, I had hoped that thou wouldst have forgotten thy former feelings, and by degrees have learned to look upon me with a more kindly eye. I had hoped that the deep, strong love which I bore thee, would, in time, have won thee to feel those ties of affection towards me which nature did not prompt; but alas, we may not control the fine emotions of the natural impulses. Thou didst obey thy father’s mandate, and became my wife; yea, my faithful, virtuous and submissive wife; giving obedience where thou couldst not love; yielding esteem and reverence with loyal duty and fidelity, with so noble and self-sacrificing a spirit, that my own heart reproached me for severing thy holy ties of affection from the object of their devotion. I am now a prisoner in the hands of a relentless and unfeeling enemy, from whom I can hope for no compassion or mercy; and now thou art with me, I have one boon to beg; I can, nor will longer claim thee as my wife—be free. - It is not fitted that thou shouldst be a captive’s bride; there is another who loves thee with a love worthy of thy deep, womanly devotion; go to him, Tecuiclipó, and bid him, if it is in his power, to give me one more chance to strike for Tenochtitlan! if he can rescue me let it be for my country’s sake; and thou, thou, Tecuiclipó, shalt be his, as the gods have intended, and even if fate fixes me in this spot, he may still take thee to his heart. Come life or death, freedom or chains, Cuitlahua resigns thee, Tecuiclipó, to Guatemozin; his noble heart will make amends to thee for any cold neglect of my uncouth and uncultured bosom towards thee. Bear this message from me to Guatemozin, that if I never again see the light of the goodly day, that he at least, will hold faithful to the honor of our ancient empire, and never yield it to the hands of stranger foes, while there is an Aztec left to wield a spear or a shield, between the realm of the Otomies and the peaks of the isthmus, which parts the rival oceans.’”

“I will! I will!” exclaimed Guatemozin energetically, starting half way up from his couch; “Cuitlahua must be saved! Bars,

bolts, chains, stones, nor dungeon-depths, shall keep his glorious heart in thralldom ! If heaven will send restoration to this withered arm, it shall strike a blow yet for Cuitlahua and Mexico ! and thee, Tecuiclipo, thee !”

While this conversation had occurred between Guatemozin and Tecuiclipo, Malmiztic and Tecalco had wandered into one of the distant chambers of the great cave. It was a place of extraordinary natural beauty. The vast stone ribs of the world's great frame were here visible ; layer after layer of granite masses were piled upon each other in solid and stupendous grandeur. The vast height of the apartment, and the immense scale upon which the hand of nature had here wrought, produced within the mind of the beholder, a sense of man's insignificance.

“Behold !” said the Toltec, “how the great Architect of the Universe builds up the foundations of the world's outer structure ! Far below this, he hath fires feeding themselves on the combustibles in the earth's huge heart ; these vast furnaces burn away the clay and stone crusts of the monster veins and arteries of the globe's deep vitals ; torrents burst from their conduits, and rivers rush roaring into lakes of fire ! then clouds of the irresistible element steam arise, and the bands of earth and rock are too feeble to constrain its might—wide open it tears its terrible way, and the solid earth is shaken to its centre by the earthquake's convulsion, and while Earth cracks from its surface to its centre, whole acres sink in the huge gaps, into bottomless lakes of gloomy, lifeless, inky waters ; or, perchance, upheaving from the vast crypt and cauldron of the central furnaces, a fire spout of the red and liquid lava, which, boiling over the white peak of Popocatepetl, pours in a sweeping cataract down through snow, rocks, and forests, and spreads wide in the valleys below. But, Tecalco, the Indescribable God, who moves this wondrous machinery by his agents, the elements, is not less mysterious in his minutest work than that which seems to us the most sublime. In the wilderness of starry worlds which float through heaven, there is not more harmony and order than in the laws which govern the unfolding leaves of the smallest flower which opens its white and red-laced eye to gaze out at the great golden sun, when his face illuminates at morn the mountain's coronet. So does this great

Spirit operate upon our elementary principles of good, and regulating these by action, comes the great controlling agent of the all-powerful, Reason—the oracle who, sitting in the sanctuary of the soul, weighs right and wrong in her hands as in even-balanced scales. His mysterious power chains us by sympathies whose operations are inexplicable, and plants within our hearts the pure passion of Love, that feeling which gives mortality a foretaste of heaven. Oh, Tecalco! my mind hath felt noble emotions when drinking at the fountain of knowledge, whose sources are far up in the mountains of Reflection—springs, whose exquisite taste gives the soul satisfaction, and yet a thirst for more—waters which the rude world only drinks of when it has lost its coolness, its purity and freshness, by creeping through the flat, muddy marshes and canals of human customs and human vices. But the pure fountain of the heart is Love: it is compassless and infinite; it is the first great attribute of God himself—from Him it descendeth to the lowest link in the chain of creation; it is universal as light, pervading animated existence from an atom to an angel! It is part of God's own being, which he bestows upon his creature man, infusing his divine essence into the heart of humanity, whereby man's earthly nature partakes of a heavenly character. Tecalco! all the deep joys which I have felt in my life's long search for wisdom have never brought me the pure bliss and beatitude which have arisen in my heart when it has felt and known that thy young soul leaned upon mine, and gave its love to me. Yea, when I have seen in the hazel depths of those eyes, affection looking forth into mine, like a water fairy gazing out of her crystal cave in a shaded lake, I have felt myself no longer companionless—the wide world was no longer lone to me. That the last remnant of the Toltec race had passed into eternity, and left me standing by myself, like a solitary pine upon the summit of a barren mountain,—this was a thought which no longer left me desolate, because thou hadst sprung up like a young magnolia by my side, and uplifted the white blossoms of thy love to cheer my dark canopy above thee. Tecalco! thou hast filled a wide world for me with thy single presence, even as the single moon fills the whole sky with light. Thou hast populated the deserted mansions of my heart—thou hast come to me,

as I have strayed among the tombs and ruined temples of mine ancestry, and 'mid their melancholy loneliness thou hast cheered me, when my hope's bright flower was paling on the stem, and when I have stood silent and solitary beneath the sad, gigantic palm-trees which towered above the palaces of my departed people, and I have felt myself the sole remaining link of an ancient race left upon the earth, the overpowering thought almost crushed me with its unutterable sense of isolation. No father, mother, brethren nor kindred—no tie of blood or nation. Back of me all lies buried. The dark, voiceless tomb has long since closed upon the last of my race. Idolatry has risen and reared her temples in the sacred groves where erst the only true and living God had his sanctuary and shrine. Those pure and holy haunts of heavenly spirits have been desecrated, and horrid orgies have succeeded with the benighted race who have risen upon the graves of my sires. Futurity upon the earth promises no brighter vision, no gleam of golden sunshine, bursting through the black and gloomy clouds of fanaticism, in the span of life which will be allotted to me—for, Tecalco, child of my heart! night now thickens over this Aztec nation. Strange men, with false ideas of the true God, are now in our midst—powerful and terrible men, gifted with clear minds, but bloody hearts—turning their eyes upon heaven, but their souls upon gold. For years I have urged upon this nation the God of love and truth, but they hear me not. Their kings, who should have wisdom, are misguided by blind, fanatical priests; and though I have placed the lights of learning in their schools, that the young, uncontaminated mind might follow the paths which lead to wisdom and happiness, these dark sorcerers of idolatry who fill the temple, raise a dark cloud of superstition, and all are gone astray. Thy father, to whom I have so often prayed, has been deaf to entreaty. It required no prophet's eye to foresee the evil which has fallen upon him. In vain I pointed out the peril in which he stood, but sad fatalism had fixed itself upon his soul, and he has quietly submitted to become a sacrifice, not for his country, but for his fears—and now behold! in a night the noblest men of all the land lie slaughtered, and the triumphant enemy rests undisturbed, like the panther, which, filled with blood, returns to his lair, they

quietly retire to the heart of our capital. There they keep their stronghold, and they will yet work such woe, that posterity will tremble when their fearful tale is told. Tecalco, marvel not if this vast empire be scattered like the loose leaves in the whirlwind ; marvel not, if the foundations of this government be broken up, and a new kingdom rise upon its ruins. There are a few noble souls, whose work may for a while uphold the failing fabric, but alas ! the structure must fall, and bury even its defenders and supporters ; for those who have fastened themselves like a poison-vine upon the trunk of our tree of empire, year by year they will cling closer, and clasp, in their deadly embrace, branch after branch, until vitality is gone from the parent stock, and the rank, vicious vine of Spanish power shall flourish in green vigor over the bare and blighted palm tree of Aztec authority ! But now, Tecalco, I feel that all my efforts for thy father's sake have been of no avail ; but there is one object left in life for me to devote my whole soul's love to—one upon whom I could concentrate all my faith, affection and care—and, loved one of my soul, it is thyself ! Night by night, when the angels have lighted the starry lamps in the blue halls of heaven, I have wandered forth alone, but thy spirit was soon by my side, and I have felt happier, holier, to know that there was one whom I could love, and who could love me in return, with a fervid, deep and heart-thrilling love—a love of boundless scope—a woman's love ! And this thought, Tecalco, made me contented to bear the evils of earthly existence with cheerfulness ; for a voice of faith, stronger than the oaths of a thousand oracles, whispered to me through the chambers of the heart, that there would be a time when a better day would dawn upon us ; that if this earth had no spot where happiness could make her home, that there were other spheres in which we yet might dwell. With this faith, I have even smiled at the thought of death, feeling and knowing that after this load of cares and clay is laid down, that we shall rise in immortality of substance and spirit, clothed with bodies which will not perish nor know the ills of pain, ever progressing towards infinite bliss, and moving towards higher and happier spheres, forever and forever—knowing, that in the innumerable system of mighty planets, there be scenes of such wondrous enjoyment and happi-

ness to come, that the dull, common mind of man, engrossed with mundane matters, may not compass or comprehend their extatic delights.

“Do not, dear Tecalco, deem that I vaguely surmise as a wild rhapsodist, whose enthusiasm bears him on into ideal and fanciful spheres. No, in my soul’s deepest recesses I feel that high and holy faith which dispels every doubt, and to follow which, all the terrors of death, in multitudinous form, would not make me waver. I see the shores of the sunny land of heaven, and the sea of fire which surges between here and there, with its canopy of stifling smoke, is no barrier or check to my course. I step into my shell, my boat of faith, and vainly the terrible red waves roar around me, and beat my scathless bark. I pass to another realm, and thou! thou! the young angel of my hope and love, to bear me company; to lend the beauty of those mortal eyes to light the shores of immortality, and make Malmiztic’s memory of earth, a joy to bless forever!”

During this long speech of the Toltec, they had been side by side upon a ledge of rock, beautifully cushioned, and overspread with spotted skins of the ocelot, and at some distance on the other side of the vast subterranean chamber, the dwarf was playing a wild air, which echoed through the hollow vault of the cavern. Tecalco turned her bewitchingly beautiful eyes upward, full upon the dark, shaded orbs of the Toltec, as she leaned confidently and affectionately upon his broad shoulder with one arm, and with the other hand pressed in the broad palm of Malmiztic, she replied,

“Look not so sad, oh, Malmiztic! (when I see those deep, strange eyes grow dim and melancholy, I am miserable. I would rather see thee in thy fiercest mood, when they blaze in their blackness like a fire by night. When thou art gloomy, a cloud is on my soul; I have no sunshine, save in thy smile, and if thou now wilt withdraw its radiance and cheerfulness, where shall Tecalco turn to find one eye to light her lonely way?) Malmiztic, till late I had a world around to love me, but I have given it for thee; and were it a thousand worlds filled with an infinite host of beings, I would not change their love for thine. My father no longer watches me; he loved me, but he would have given his

child to that hated Spaniard, that cruel Cortes, whose fierce and fearful eyes were revolting to my sight, and at the touch of whose hand, my heart recoiled as from a cold serpent. In vain I prayed to Montezuma to save his child; he answered me, that his country needed a sacrifice for its salvation, and that to save his throne I must become the Spaniard's bride; again I prayed him to spare me, but he reproached me with base ingratitude for deserting the father who had cherished me. At that moment, I, wild with desperation, bade him slay me on the altar's top, on the block of sacrifice, on the pinnacle of the great temple, where the eyes of thousands could behold me offered up to the acceptance of the gods. This thought appeased him, and he sent for the High-Priest; but deeply dyed as the robes of that hypocritical monster were in blood, he had not the heart for the deed, and refused the offering. He had heard and told my father that thy precepts and faith were deeply seated in my soul, and that if the vengeance of the Toltec's god were roused, some fell calamity, more terrible a thousand-fold than legions of Christian troops, would overtake them all. Again Montezuma came to me, and bade me be the bride of the cruel Cortes; once more I prayed, I supplicated, I knelt at his feet, and bathing them with tears besought him in the name, and for the sake of my dead mother, to spare and save me! Entreaty, plea and tears were all in vain; he bade me, under the penalty of a father's deepest, bitterest curse, to be the Spaniard's bride. I went to Cortes, and from that moment all the thousand natural ties of parental love which clung to him like my heart-strings, were snapped at a blow. I could have died for my father before that act, died without a murmur at my fate, but now that he had abandoned me to a bloody stranger, because of his cowardly heart, I could at that moment have beheld my father fall at my feet a corse, and not have shed a tear! He had deserted me; he had cast me off, who had clung to him with the love of a hundred children. He had sold me, his worshiping, idolizing offspring, to the foul lust of a black-hearted marauder, and all from fear! base, unmanly cowardice—vile, heartless, timidity! The Spaniard, cruel and unfeeling as my father, but not so criminal, listened not to my petitions; he laughed at my prayers, and made a bitter jest of

my virtue. God of our faith ! Malmiztic, at that moment I was hopeless ; I was wild with phrenzy ; I shuddered with horror at my perilous position ; my soul sank like an ebbing tide within me, and my terrible master gloated over me with a savage delight. In this awful moment of despair, a swift thought flashed over my brain, and I prayed ! aye, Malmiztic, I prayed to the God, whose holy name thou hadst taught me to invoke, and oh ! it was a prayer from the deepest sanctuary of my soul ; my heart was upon my lips ; though I spake not, my supplication was not unheard, for then, like a messenger of heaven sent to rescue me, a form appeared, and I was saved ! That form was thine, Malmiztic ! yes, thine ! and from that hour how the love I bore thee has grown, expression may not tell. It was a soft, sweet, glowing dream before, a moonlight of the soul ; but now, it is all the light of life gathered into one bright spark, illuminating every portion of my being—a light which leads me beyond this life, and urges my soul to follow thine through every sphere. A love which life nor death may sever ; a love whose existence has had beginning, but which nothing but utter annihilation can exterminate. I will be with thee as the evening star with the moon, the shadow with the substance, the echo with the sound. Where thou musest by the ruins at sunset, I will sit by thy side to muse likewise ; where thou mournest or art touched with sadness, there will I shed the sympathetic tear ; when thou art lonely, I will cheer thee, and when grief has weighed me down, I will lean on thee for rest. By thy dwelling I will set the brightest rose, and at the portal of thy palace I will plant the pale lilies, which shall bow to thee as thou passest them. With music will I chase thy melancholy moments, and loitering at thy feet, will tell thee many a wild tale, until they are grown old stories, or until we ourselves have grown old ; but we shall never grow old at heart ; the happy hereafter will forever smile upon us, and the evening of existence will but forerun the dawn of a new day. We shall be happy, Malmiztic ! happy, though the empire crumble to ruins at our feet ! happy ! though we should live as hermits in the hollow-buried palaces of thy Toltec forefathers, yea, even though we should behold the strangers plant their standard in the halls of our kings, and the image of their worship in the temple of

the Aztec idols. We at least will put our trust in a God whose temple is indestructible, and to whom all earthly mutations are as simple as the growth and fall of a leaf. Say but that thou wilt not scorn my humble love, which looks up to thee as the flower to the star. Say that thou wilt not deem my affection dross, because my weak woman's mind cannot grapple with the great and mysterious like thy giant intellect. Only love me as kindly ever, as now thou dost, and Tecalco shall find her heaven before she leaves the earth."

"Light of my life!" exclaimed the Toltec with enthusiasm, as he enfolded in his arms the beautiful creature, whose dark, lustrous eyes were upturned to his countenance, "spirit of my hope! thy pure being hath imbibed the holy religion of nature, and made thy earthly loveliness to me become a thing of heaven!—Henceforth trust me that so long as the fingery leaves of the fern wave themselves from the ruins of Tezcozinco, Malmiztic, the Toltec, will have thy image upon his heart, plain as the sculptured figure of his forefather engraved on the massive marble which lifts its lofty shaft among the sacred palms!"

The head of the fair girl dropped upon the broad bosom of the philosopher, and a tear started to each of his dark, mysterious eyes; they were pearls of price, drawn by Love out of the fathomless depths of the heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

CORTES, after the defeat of Narvaez, proceeded with the troops of the latter, who had joined his own, on to the great city of Tlascala, where having arrived, he was hospitably received by Maxixcatzin, the old chief of the republic, who showed him every friendly attention which it was possible to bestow ; and after seeing the troops well provided for in quarters, prepared a sumptuous banquet, upon which they feasted heartily, after the toils and hardships of their expedition.

Cortes had now won the favor and confidence of almost the entire senate and people of Tlascala, save the proud, high-souled Xicotencatl. In him the deep-seated, time-cherished animosity of the Tlascalans against the Aztecs, was no less great than his zealous, patriotic distrust of the fierce invaders who had now become the allies of Tlascala. No persuasion could induce him to partake in giving welcome to Cortes and the Christians, and with a few friends he held himself sternly aloof, and preserved a silent but threatening neutrality. The Spanish general now broke to Maxixcatzin his purpose of overthrowing the Aztec empire, and his immediate design of investing the capital. This news met with warm sanction and hearty approval upon the part of the old chieftain and his adherents, and upon the strength thereof, they proffered to Cortes the entire power of the soldiers of the republic, together with all the munitions and provisions of war, which the general might require ; but the latter declined to be encumbered with an unnecessarily large body of warriors, whose presence might naturally excite ill blood, and engender strife which might otherwise be averted ; but he nevertheless had the troops of the republic marshaled upon a great plain, near the city of Tlascala, and from the immense body of warriors, he selected some seven or eight thousand of such as he deemed most efficient ;

these in combination with his two thousand Spanish infantry, and one hundred horse, he proceeded to arrange and review, in true military style. Little time was required to make the well-trained Tlascalans conform to the evolutions which the Christians performed before them; but notwithstanding their tractability, the roar of the park of artillery, as it was rapidly planted, and moved from place to place in the field, inspired them with instinctive awe at the remembrance of the former havoc which it had wrought among their warriors, when Cortes had first attempted to penetrate their territory. The terrific power of the cannon was now exhibited by directing the artillery against a neighboring grove, when the giant branches of the trees were shivered and torn away by the tremendous force of the mighty engines. Everything necessary in the equipment of his army being now prepared, Cortes set forth through the district of Tlascala, and after passing its confines, once more descended from the mountain wall which fenced in the valley of the lakes to the mighty metropolis, Mexico, leading some nine thousand men, with which he entered the city. Almost immediately after his troops were bestowed, Cortes sent for Alvarado to come at once to his quarters. The fiery cavalier was prompt to obey his commander, and came boldly up and addressed him with his usual respect and freedom of manner; but Cortes repulsed him with a savage scowl and demanded:

"What is this which I hear—to what purpose have you put the power with which I entrusted you? In what manner have you supported the honor of the church, and the interest of your sovereign? For what end have you violated my imperative order to preserve peace?"

"To save your Spanish soldiers from becoming sacrifices," replied Alvarado, coolly.

"A foolish fear," answered Cortes, "a hasty provocation of the ire of a powerful enemy upon a shallow and unmeaning pretext."

"Nay, sir," said Alvarado, with more warmth, "we were menaced and threatened by danger, and was it for me to wait until the foe should have all his deadly schemes prepared to execute before I roused to meet it? Was it for me to sit tamely by

and see these sacrilegious heathens desecrate the image of the Virgin, which we have erected in the neighboring temple?"

"Nay," answered Cortes, "but the means were disproportionate to the end—it demanded no violence to defend our rights. If redress had been demanded, it had been granted against the offenders; but you rouse an enemy in his own house, by taking the law in your own hands."

"But there was danger," said Alvarado, waxing warmer, "great danger, close at hand, insult added to injury; and all around me I saw a fearful storm brewing, which I must dissipate, before it burst upon the heads of my Christian companions; for their sakes I felt it my duty to strike for the honor of the cross and Castile!"

"Ay, but by my conscience!" said Cortes, using his peculiar and most frequent phrase, with uncommon vehemence, "It needed not that the earth should be deluged with blood to effect this end."

Alvarado's black eyes glittered as he replied, sarcastically, "Indeed! I knew not that blood was so abhorrent to you; methought it was your favorite pastime to sweep whole tribes before you. Slaughter was not so dreadful when you slew the Cholulans."

"Fair, open war," answered Cortes, "is not midnight murder. The free blade of a Christian knight may be as easily drawn to punish as defend."

"Then where lies the outrage of my act?" questioned Alvarado, and his handsome face grew crimson with anger and excitement, as he spake.

"Where does it lie?" exclaimed Cortes, violently, "where does it lie? In the foul manner of the deed; in the darkness of the hour, which turns honorable conflict into black assassination. Your crime should blot your name from the book of knights, and place it among human butchers."

"By Santiago!" shouted Alvarado, as he sprung to his feet, hurled his glove upon the floor, and drew his sword, "I will not hear this though St. James himself spake it. Mortal man shall not taunt me with cowardice or cruelty unbecoming the honor of my order. I care not, Don Hernando Cortes, though thou art

the general of this company, I at least am a Spaniard, a knight and a nobleman, and in no wise thy inferior. I, sir, have supported thee from the hour that thou wert compelled to fly from Cuba, and this is the grateful reward for my fidelity ; this is my reward for having stood by thee when half the company had mutinied, and thou hadst to burn thy ships to save thy expedition from bearing thee back to be beheaded as a traitor. There, there lies my guantlet ; accept the gage, if thou darest to prove me unworthy of the cross I bear !”

A bitter smile came over the compressed lips of the politic Cortes, as with a rapid effort he reined in his rising passion, and prudently moderated his tone of reprimand, when he saw Alvarado wrought to the extreme.

“ Take the guantlet, foolish, rash boy,” said he, stooping and raising the glove, which he extended to the other ; “ put up thy sword, though it be rashly and indiscreetly used, it shall not prove thy valor against me ; for I like thyself have no name to make for courage. Reserve thy bravery for battle ; for though I have been sorely grieved by thy imprudence, yet I bear thee no malice. No more of this—to thy quarters and thy duties !” so saying, the passionate but prudent Cortes sank back upon a lounge, and the fierce, black-eyed Alvarado, whose brow, late of crimson, was now marble, passed out of the quarters of Cortes, involved in a variety of contending emotions.

Cortes now made his way to the presence of Montezuma. The habitual gloom of the monarch had deepened since he last saw him, and it now contained a sort of desperation which was clearly visible to the observing eye of the Spaniard.

“ I hear,” said Cortez, “ that since my departure for the coast, thy people have grown perverse, and have cut off the supplies which hitherto they have furnished to my soldiers.”

“ And have you not heard,” said Montezuma, “ that the vile slave in whose care thy soldiers were left, has broken all faith and treaty between us, and like a foul vampire, descended by night, and sucked the heart’s blood of this empire ? Yea, stolen with his troop of ghosts and ogres through the pallid moonlight, to a peaceful palace, and there murdered innocent and unprotected men—banqueted upon blood in their festal hall. Yes,

Cortes, this fiend has destroyed the flower of Aztec nobility, without cause and without conscience. Can it then surprise thee that our people, shocked by the enormity of this deed of terror, should fail to feed these vultures?"

"Go to," said the Spaniard impatiently, while his brow contracted as he spoke, "dost thou think that I cannot tell thee the evil which was plotted against my people. Thy dogs deemed that because I was gone to the coast, they would seize the hour as a fitting occasion to destroy my followers who remained behind, and I now say to thee, that unless the markets of this city are opened, and shortly, I will make such havoc with thy villainous legions, as will make the work of Alvarado seem like child's play; and mark you, Montezuma, to you I look that this be done, and remember well that if it is not, the penalty will likewise fall on thee."

The Indian girl, Marina, who had interpreted the conversation between them, had now but little need to express their meaning, for Montezuma had almost as readily caught the Spanish language, as Cortes had the Aztec tongue.

"How should I," said the emperor significantly, "be able to control the feelings of the people when I am a close prisoner."

"You have authority," replied the other, "to send for whom you like, and you may issue your mandate from this palace as well as from yonder greater one."

"But my word has fallen," said Montezuma; "in return I have no longer the heart or control of this people."

"Then who has?" questioned the Christian.

"One," returned the emperor, "who lies in bondage undeserved; one that I now feel has far more power or influence than myself; one whose stern spirit all the pains of captivity could never crush or conquer—Cuitlahua, the prince of Iztapalapan."

"Has he the power to make thy people furnish food?" questioned Cortes.

"He has," replied the other, "the imperative force of his character will command that attention from the Aztec people, which will insure implicit obedience to all which he says."

"Then," said Cortes suddenly, "he shall go at large."

"Aye, let him pass free," said Montezuma, "and in three

days thou shalt see a fleet of corn filled boats coming over the waves of Tezcuco, and emptying themselves upon the banks of every canal in Tenochtitlan. All the products of the land will be poured forth, and thy people shall be satisfied."

"Enough," said Cortes, rising impulsively; "I will test the authority of this same Cuitlahua, and if he fail me, look you well to the consequences."

Cortes now left Montezuma, and hastened to the dungeon where the prince of Iztapalapan was immured. Upon bringing him forth, Cortes started back with astonishment at the fearful change which had come over the countenance and figure of the captive. His eye was hollow and sunken; his flesh wasted, and his brown complexion grown of an ashy paleness. Cortes, after bidding the guard strike the shackles from his wrists and ankles, said to Cuitlahua, in the language of the country,

"Depart, and see that in three days this city be filled with a plenteous supply of provisions."

Cuitlahua answered not a word, but passing away, turned back his black and spectral eyes upon Cortes, with a look which almost made the latter incline to recapture him; but he, notwithstanding, permitted the gaunt Aztec to go in peace, but not without some singular suspicions or forebodings that it was not well to trust the stern Cuitlahua; however, he quieted himself by the reflection that he yet had Montezuma, and him he could make answerable for the default of the other.

The morrow verified the doubts of Cortes, for no fresh supplies came, but it was evident some fearful disruption was near at hand. The tall figure of Guatemozin, who had now recovered, had been seen with the fiery Cuitlahua, and the mysterious Toltec, moving secretly but rapidly through every portion of the capital. Scouts were scouring the whole neighboring territory; masses of the people congregated in the streets and public places, and all the signs which a coming difficulty could portend were everywhere visible. Pikes, lances and slings were now openly borne in the streets, and the glances which the populace gave the Spanish soldiery, as they passed by the Christian quarters, spoke as plainly as words could express, a spirit of defiance. Crowds hung continually upon the skirts of the Christians wherever they

moved about the city, and the menacing air of all the inhabitants conspired to impress upon the mind of the commander of the Christians a firm belief that a revolution now threatened the Cavaliers and their cause; but the chivalric heart of the plotting and ambitious general was not now to be shaken by a surmise of danger. He had defeated and captured his enemy, Narvaez, and no longer dreaded the power of Velasquez. Success he felt certain would insure him popularity in Spain with Charles, and even serve to silence his enemy, the Bishop of Burgos; and the golden treasures of the Aztec realm he believed were now just beginning to burst upon his vision, in all their untold and exhaustless richness. Soon he confidently calculated to return to his native land in such a blaze of magnificence and incomparable wealth, as should make the highest grandees of Spain, or even Europe, seem like paupers. He already grasped in his mind means which would purchase principalities, and of the coming fortunes which he beheld, not a doubt crossed his hope and belief—the realm of gold was full before his vision—his eyes already measured bars, ingots, and suns of gold. To him it was no dream, no vague possibility, no doubtful prospect shadowed forth dimly in the future—but a real, present, actual thing, which was close at hand, with a mere intervening curtain, which, drawn back, would reveal such shining and immeasurable masses of treasure, that the old world would be struck dumb with wonder and admiration—and he, Hernando Cortes, the Cræsus of the age!

Thus, ambition, hope, and avarice painted upon the canvass of the time to come a gorgeous and delusive mirage, whose waves of silver reflected back the images of a million golden palaces, fretted with flashing gems, like countless stars, redoubled in the deep! But yet it was a mirage, destined to dazzle for a while with its gilded brilliancy, and then fade out forever. Cortes, however, had now toiled hard to gain a glimpse of this promised land, and to quietly yield the object of his ambition was not in keeping with his character. Ever vigilant and alert, he maintained a strict guard and thorough discipline among his troops, and studiously compelled the strictest observance of military order;

even the habitual exercise of the grand imposing ceremonies of religion, which had no less the effect of stimulating the courage of the soldiery, than of mystifying the untutored natives of the country.

This careful system of discipline, upon the part of the Spanish general, was not uncalled for, as the developments of every hour evinced. Swarms of natives poured into the city from every contiguous country, but yet the character of the market was not improved, and, as this was the subject upon which Cortes had shown the greatest solicitude, the disappointment was no slight source of annoyance. That an outbreak was pending, he did not doubt, and, therefore, he issued orders that every weapon in the Spanish camp be carefully examined, and, if defective, be repaired—using extraordinary diligence to see that the horses, those effective and terrible causes of dismay to the Aztecs, were well conditioned and supplied—and no old commander, in the Moorish war, could have more coolly set about preparation to resist a siege, than did Hernando Cortes to forestall the purposes of the people whose realm he had usurped.

The exertion of Guatemozin, Cuitlahua, and Malmiztic was immense; no stone was left unturned which could excite ire or jealousy against Cortes and his companions; and especially was the ancient grudge towards the Tlascalans, the confederates of the Christians, aroused and revived.

Men and munitions of war were rapidly, but silently, collecting; scarce an ancient or fortified building could be found in the metropolis in which the politic leaders of the native people had not stored an armory of such weapons as were in use with the inhabitants of the valley, or the warriors of the surrounding territories; innumerable stacks of maquahuitls, lances, pikes, swords of obsidian, copper-headed spears, and slings, together with incalculable quantities of bows and arrows, darts, and other harassing missiles, filled the hidden halls and subterranean chambers of the mighty piles whose granite walls loomed up in solid grandeur out of the salt waves of the azure Tezcuco. Not a grove nor a woody garden could be found in the city in whose shades the active, energetic Cuitlahua and his associates had not

addressed the multitudes, with that burning enthusiasm which earnestness communicates from the orator to his audience. The feeling which had hitherto been repressed in the public bosom, now kindled into an ardent desire to return upon the heads of the intruders a full retaliation of the late cold-blooded crime which had bathed one of their splendid palaces in the crimson heart-floods of the Mexican nobility. It was a feeling in which the popular pulse beat as the throb of a single heart—the impulse to rise and throw off the oppressive weight of the strangers spread from man to man, as the kindling flame reaches from blade to blade of the brown grass, when autumn has seared the prairie. It was the gathering of the grey-winged clouds, which congregate in dark assembly upon peak and pinnacle of the mountain heights, until their collected masses darken the valley with their shadow; and even like the tempest cloud, were the people filled full of electric fire. The moment was now at hand, when their vengeance, like the lightning's red dart, should flash forth and bicker over the heads of the Christians. No noise accompanied this vast preparation; it was the silent mustering of mighty elements, the noiseless approach of a vast power; not even a muttered discord of coming thunder was heard; even the low murmurs of the multitude grew less, until it became a deadly quiet, like the fearful calm whose awful hush for a breathless space precedes the outburst of the hurricane.

Cortes was now to meet, for the first time, the opposition of the Aztecs in their own city, and to contend against a people who had every incentive to urge them to battle to the death; men, whose religion had been assailed, whose household happiness had been broken in upon, whose monarch had been made a captive, and whose nobility had been ruthlessly butchered without provocation and without redress.

Strange was the spell which had withheld, thus long, the revenge for all this multiplicity of wrongs; but though the web which the arch magician, Cortes, had been weaving over the Aztec empire, like a spider's toils, was now to be broken, yet still, like a master spirit of sorcery, he held unshaken the confidence and control of the brave band, who shook their swords in the face of danger and shouted defiance to the decrees of fate.

With these men and his own soul's lofty ambition to spur him on, Hernando Cortes stood, like the genius of knighthood, all in mail, with one hand upon his sword, and the other supporting the blazing banner of the cross. A tournament was open, and a tilt was to be run—a hemisphere for a prize, and all the nations of the earth for spectators! If chivalry could be embodied, he now resolved to represent it—for Spain, the Cross, and Cortes!

CHAPTER XXII.

It was in the latter part of June, in the year fifteen hundred and twenty, that the troops and allies of Don Hernando Cortes were making their usual march around the great city of Tenochtitlan, in scattered parties, headed by Alvarado, Sandoval, De Olid, and other captains, who came forth both for the purpose of guarding those who furnished them provisions, and making observations upon the operations and movements of the enemy; the result was that they found the troops of Mexico in arms and headed by the daring Cuiclahua, prince of the opposite city of Iztapalapan, and now the acting leader and governor of the Aztec empire. Upon hearing that he had made his appearance in public, Cortes dispatched a company to go down and demand him as a prisoner; but, no sooner had the company arrived where he was, than they were assailed by a perfect tempest of slings and arrows, insomuch that, in spite of their bravery, the Spaniards were compelled to retire and report to their commander. Cortes immediately selected four hundred men, and without delay marched directly upon them; they were occupying much the same ground as when the other party retired, and prepared to make the same resistance and assault; but Cortes, with his resolute charge, broke in upon them and drove them all before him. When they fell back, he ordered his soldiers to set fire to the neighboring buildings, which being done, drew off all the Aztecs from the fight to preserve their property. - Notwithstanding this repulse, they continued their hostilities shortly after, when Cortes hearing of it, sent Captain Ordaz, a brave soldier and an efficient engineer, with two hundred men, to disperse them. Ordaz was not long in effecting a confusion among the enemy, which was followed by a flight; he pursued them until he had apparently made a complete rout of the entire party, when sud-

denly Guatemozin, with a fresh body of Aztecs, burst out upon him, and almost instantly surrounded the Spaniards.

Ordaz immediately ordered a retreat, but finding this impracticable, he essayed to force his way straight onward, when he met with such showers of arrows, as rendered it impossible to proceed. His position had now become exceedingly perilous; he was harassed upon all sides, and every effort at retreat met with the same rebuff, added to which the missiles of the foe rained upon them so thick that his men were wounded in every vulnerable point. Ordaz now made an effort to gain a large building close at hand, and had almost reached the doorway, when Cuitlahua, discovering the design, rushed boldly forward by his hosts, and before the brave Spaniard could gain a footing upon the portal, he found himself face to face with the prince of Iztapalapan. Not a moment for hesitation was necessary with Ordaz; he dashed forward at once and attacked the chief with an alacrity and power which demanded all the activity and skill of the other to defend; but Ordaz pushed his pursuit so far, that suddenly the Aztec, followed by his friends, came upon the bold cavalier, and despite his most strenuous efforts to maintain his ground, he was forced back, and Cuitlahua, following up his advantage, came suddenly upon the Spaniard, and inflicted a wound upon him which disabled the latter sorely; his companions now seeing his perilous position, made a rush for a rescue, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he could be extricated.

Ordaz now ordered his men to concentrate themselves in as small space as possible, and cut their way out at all hazards, as their situation was one which it would be impossible to hold.—This movement was successful, but not without severe loss, as eight Spaniards were killed, and not a single one of the whole Christian company escaped without being wounded.

The next day hostilities were renewed and upon a more extensive scale; Cortes brought out nearly all the Spanish power, leaving only a few cavaliers and the Tlascalcan allies to guard the quarters. Guatemozin had arrayed an immense host with stones, darts, and slings along the roofs and parapets of the houses, which being flat afforded a fine field for harassing those in the streets below. Cuitlahua, with an immense host, held possession

of the chief highways, and from the time that Cortes came forth in the morning, he maintained a fierce conflict all day long, retreating and forming immediately that his hosts were broken. Through the early part of the day, though the Spaniards carried every equal fight, yet Cortes found his own men falling in such numbers, that even the terrible onslaught which he made with the enemy would not justify the continuance of the conflict at such a cost.

In the latter portion of the day, the Aztecs seemed to have caught a new spirit, and began afresh to rain missiles from the house-tops; clouds of arrows and darts were shot down at the foe, and a torrent of stones of tremendous weight were hurled upon the heads of the Spaniards. As night came on, the battle grew less, and Cortes retired without much opposition.

The next day the conflict was renewed under similar circumstances, but with more terrific consequences, for Cortes saw such havoc made by the enemy that he ordered his artillery into use, which terrible engines, when brought into the crowded streets, poured forth their hoarse thunders and swept down innumerable hosts of the astonished Aztecs; but yet they yielded not in their ardor—where the dead fell, the living crowd filled their places, and fought with such heroic firmness, that when Cortes retired to the palace of Axajacatl, at night, fifty of his brave followers were found among those who slept the sleep which knows no waking; and though he had filled the streets with the bodies of the Aztecs, he felt that there was not much gain to the Christian cause, and that it would be impossible to proceed successfully, so long as his troops could be harassed from the house-tops, or his cannoniers be annoyed in the discharge of their duty, by having immense clouds of arrows, javelins, and huge stones hurled upon their defenceless heads. He, therefore, ordered his artificers to undertake the erection of certain great wooden houses upon wheels, which were called mantas; of these, in a few days, three were constructed, which all confidently calculated would obviate the difficulties under which they had hitherto labored. These mantas were so arranged, that through the port-holes, which were upon all sides, the muskets could be directed either upon the enemy in the streets or upon the parapets and roofs of the houses. To

these buildings were attached long ropes, by which they could be drawn; and in this business Cortes employed a large body of his Tlascalan allies, who readily entered in this duty, they being desirous to engage with their old enemies in any manner; and with these huge machines the Spaniards and their confederates sallied forth.

The Mexicans, for a time, were terribly annoyed by these ingenious artifices, their javelins and arrows falling harmlessly on the roof, while the musketeers and crossbowmen from within let fly their well-aimed bolts and shafts with tremendous execution; and thus the multitude of soldiers, upon the part of the Aztecs, instead of being useful and serviceable, only formed a greater and more conspicuous mark for the eyes of their opponents; but the success of these machines, in a few days, became very equivocal, for, as the Spaniards passed from one quarter of the city to another, storming every habitation, from the peasant hut to the palace, as they passed; the quick-eyed Toltec suggested a scheme of attack upon them to Cuitlahua, who readily adopted it, which was, by night, to obtain some huge stones from the ruins of old temples hard by, and lay them upon the roofs of the houses. In the morning, when the Tlascalans came shouting wildly as usual, and drawing after them by the ropes the mantas, they were suddenly surprised by hearing such huge masses of rock come thundering down as to crush in the tops, and leave those occupants, who were not wounded, exposed to the galling storm of arrows which were poured in upon them from every surrounding roof.

Cuitlahua now proceeded to destroy some of the bridges which were, here and there, across the various causeways which entered the city, after crossing the lake from the main land. No sooner had Cortes heard of this attempt upon the bridges, than he at once proceeded in the morning to dislodge the enemy from their position, but the resistance of the Aztecs was so obstinate that he was not able to cross a single bridge by midday; upon this failure, he returned with some discomfiture, to his quarters.

Thus day after day dawned and departed, and the streets would blush with blood. One day it would consist of light skirmishing; and the next, of the more sanguinary conflict, where the thousands of Aztecs would pour forth, in multitudinous mass

darkening the streets and highways, and sending clouds of arrows against the steel bonnets of the Christians.

Day's silver eye opened, and the shout of awakening warriors would be heard ringing throughout the capital. The yellow noon would find the warriors, clad in their armor of dried hides and skins of wild beasts, rushing on with their shields and shining itzli blades against the well-clad Spaniards, who would roll back their dense, dark masses like the volumes of smoke from the great thunder guns of the Europeans: and when the sable Night drew her star-dotted veil over the heavens, troop after troop of the native hosts would disappear in the shadows of the dusk, and the hoarse hum of conflict would be hushed, until the grey light again glimmered in the east, when once more they would renew the sanguinary scenes of the past day.

Montezuma had watched the progress of these things from the roof of the palace wherein he was confined, and no cessation seemed likely to occur; still the dusky tide of warriors poured into the city and still assault and resistance raged. In vain the emperor represented the imprudence of remaining to Cortes; but the latter pleaded the impossibility of retiring while such fiery attacks were likely to follow his footsteps, for now, daily, instead of declining, the uproar increased fearfully, and as soon as a party of Christians would make their appearance, they would be instantly assailed by the Aztecs, who filled every highway, lane, and avenue.

At length, after many days of this vascillating success upon the part of the contending hosts, Cuitlahua gathered his thousands together, until the mighty assemblage thronged every open space, park, public ground, thoroughfare, and sidewalk; and when the shells and horns sounded, and the wild atabals brayed forth thrilling peals, which echoed through the valley, the myriads moved forward along the streets where Cortes had torn the beautiful fronts of proud palaces away with the destructive battery of his cannon, where the snow-white walls of plaster which glittered in the sunshine, were now blackened and defaced by the smoke of the powder, and the tremendous force of the balls.

Again the roar of conflict swelled loud upon the gale, and the Christians in the streets led on their thousands of Tlascalan allies

against the myriads of Mexico. Loud and more loud rose the storming cries of the Aztecs, mingled with the stunning hum and wild discordance of the martial instruments. No sooner had they approached the Christians and their confederates, than up rose a cloud of arrows and javelins, which shadowed the sunshine like an innumerable flock of wild pigeons, roaring as they rise, and darkening the daylight with their countless wings.

The Christians and Tlascalans returned the sharp attack, and in a short time the rattle of spears upon shields, the clang of maquahuitls, the twang of bows and crossbows, were heard confused with loud, rolling volleys of musketry, and the din of battle swelled higher and louder, as some adventurous chieftain or leader would work some prodigy of daring valor.

Crowd clashed with crowd, and the black sea of heads would rise and fall as the multitude, like vast billows, advanced or recoiled; to and fro they swayed for hours, heaving back and beating onward, like an agitated ocean, the living taking no heed of the dead in their rushing progress over them, and a reckless disposition to plunge into the midst of the foe appeared on both sides.

After a time, the buildings around the combatants began to blaze, and throw forth lurid tongues of flame; and in the midst of the fearful tumult, the emperor Montezuma appeared upon the terrace of the palace; he was attended by four noblemen of his suite, and from his position he commanded a full view of the entire street where the parties were engaged. The emperor was arrayed in the most magnificent manner; his splendid dress of snowy white and sky blue blazed with the brilliant lustre of sparkling jewels; upon his brow gleamed the gorgeous diadem of empire, the gold and gem-glittering crown of the Aztec monarch; supported by his attendant officers, he approached upon the flat roof, the parapet of the palace wall, from whence he could behold the vast sea of upturned faces below, and be by them seen in return. Having reached this conspicuous spot, he lifted aloft in his right hand the golden sceptre, the symbol of sovereignty, and instantaneously the wild, loud roar and confusion of battle was hushed, and all became deadly still. It was a fearful and breathless silence, which seemed almost like a miracle in its sudden change to stillness from the tempestuous tumult of the

preceding moment ; the pulse of the vast crowd seemed to stand still, and not a sound could be heard, save now and then the deep, low groans of the dying and wounded, who were scattered around, would come up like a sigh or wailing voice from the precincts of the grave.

“My people,” the emperor began, in a weak but singularly distinct voice, “my children, and my faithful subjects, hear me calmly and dispassionately—hear me for the sake of yourselves and Mexico—hear me for your love of the ancient kings of Tenochtitlan, and your affection for your country, your homes, and your families: You are deluging this glorious city in your own hearts’ blood ; you are making the walls of your dwellings blush crimson with unholy slaughter ; you are murdering your wives and your babes, mercilessly and uselessly ; you have frightened the dove of peace, which was building her nest by our lake shore, and unloosed the zopilote and the night raven to feed upon the corpses of your children. Day after day, you have seen your brothers fall dead at your feet, and you have beheld the homes of your sires battered to ruins by the engines of your enemy. How long must this last ? When shall this madness know cessation ? When shall this wolf of slaughter have sated himself with the blood of my lambs ? What would you have ?—the enemy to evacuate our city ? He is already pledged to do so, and I have promised him that he and his allies should pass in peace. But lo ! if he but sally forth to pass the bridges, countless warriors rush upon him, and strive to stay his troops. My word has been broken, my plighted faith to him you have violated ; you have refused the promised supplies, and thereby prevented me from returning among you, knowing that my word and honor were forfeited to the stranger by your most rash and foolish act. Harken unto me, oh, my people and children ! be guided by my counsels, I, who have so often led your victorious armies through every tribe and nation between the sandy shores of our eastern gulf and the lands against which the old giant Pacific leans his heaving breast. Mark my plain advice—disband your countless horde of warriors, whose wild rage is making Tenochtitlan a desert for the wolf to roam through, a ruin for the owl to hoot from. Disperse to your homes, and hear no longer the maddening

words of those who lead you into this most suicidal act, and urge you on to make a wreck of this realm, which late was all so happy and so free. Heed not their tongues ; their words will lead you all astray, like the false light of the marsh spirit ; but cease this disgraceful clamor and carnage, whose fearful outburst shakes the mighty towers of our island metropolis to their lake-laid foundations. Return to reason, and abandon these rash and desperate men, who would light the torch of war on every peaceful home in this wild empire. Once more, I conjure you, as you love your king, your father, your realm, and your capital, let all this rage subside. If you would once more see me at the head of my people, whom I love, surrounded by wise counselors in my chamber, and a happy people throughout my empire, desist from this most dreadful and disastrous war, or behold your lovely realm a desert waste, your cities blackened and burnt ruins, your warriors corpses, your children slaves, and your broken-hearted king a captive forever."

No sooner had the emperor ceased, than a form, which towered far above the crowd, strode forth from amidst the silent and countless multitude ; he was dressed in complete armor of copper, which flashed in the sunlight, and over his shoulders fell a gorgeous surcoat of superb featherwork, and the figure of the "dropping eagle," upon his splendid helmet, told the beholder that this was Guatemozin. As he came boldly forward, with a glittering javelin in one hand, and a burnished shield upon the other arm, involuntary exclamations of admiration burst from the lips of the Spanish cavaliers, as they gazed upon his proud, erect figure advancing, while his raven-hued masses of hair rolled down upon his fair, athletic neck ; his face was sad, but filled with inexpressible nobleness and manly beauty ; beneath his pale, broad brow his bright, black eyes burned with seraphic brilliancy, as with his sonorous, clarion-like voice he replied to the emperor, with upturned eyes :

"Men of Mexico, and Montezuma, my uncle, I have a few words to say in return to your harangue : Yes, Montezuma, to you I will first address myself. There was a time when it was an honor to the empire to claim thee as its potent head ; there was a time when bravery made thy name a spell to awe the foe,

when thy judgment made the snowy heads in council bow assent to hear thy wisdom spoken ; there was a time when all the vast machinery of government under thy supervision, moved with power and precision, and every department of the mighty state performed its functions as harmoniously as the order of the seasons and the stars ; justice, seasonably tempered with humanity, preserved the humble and the poor from the evils of oppression, the nobility treated the laborer with kindness, and the laborer returned it by respect ; men of all ranks loved each other, for their common country was a bond which linked their hands together ; a smiling plenty scattered the fruits of peace and contentment throughout the broad domain ; the wide lands bloomed in the sunshine of happiness. In a fatal hour, this serpent from the east crept into our Elysian vale ; his blighting breath withered all the green lands as he passed—that breath was sulphurous smoke, and his voice the hoarse thunder gun—his scales the iron mail of armed men ; devastation blackened his pathway from the coast to Tlascala. We saw the monster approach ; we saw his huge folds close upon Tlascala and crush her—but Montezuma moved not. We saw the fierce reptile rush upon Cholula, and flourish his crimson crest over her smoking ruins and massacred thousands, towering, in bloody triumph, over her sacred temples. Clotted with gore, on came the destroying monster—but still Montezuma stirred not, save with a resistance like a reed against the hurricane. At length, the increasing serpent moves its huge folds onward, until its arching neck overlooks from the mountain wall the valley of beauty below ; its broad eyes gloat and glitter over the scene, and anon its gorgeous, many-hued body is seen to wind down from the heights, through dells and ravines, making the dark woods brilliant with its burnished armor ; and lo ! with its haughty crest erect, its voluminous folds came swelling up the vale towards the cherished city and home of our hearts. Where is Montezuma ? Comes he out with a legion to assail the terrible enemy ? Calls he upon every province in the realm to rush to the rescue ? Leads he the host who go to meet the monster in their might, or die defending what they could not save ? No, Mexicans, no ! Montezuma, cowardly and trembling,

shrank back, his white, bloodless heart quailed and quivered, and the hand, once so stout to scatter the strongest foe, now quaked with craven cowardice, and from servile fear led this monster with a kiss into our capital, and made the habitations of our ancestors his home. Need I point to the serpent? He coiled in yon palace; he burst forth upon the city—and behold, it is a ruin! His pestilent breath has blighted every green hope of happiness or flower of peace; he has darted forth his venomous tongue armed with the red lances of the forked lightning, and lo! a black cloud envelops the lakes and the land, and death strikes myriads dead in the street. Men of Mexico, shall I show you the weak and craven soul, which, for its own safety, has sold an empire? Shall I show you the serpent? Behold the Spaniards and their confederates! Shall I show you the coward and traitor, the black-hearted traitor, who has filled your dwellings with the mournful wail of widows, and the lone cries of fatherless babes—the fiend who has robbed many a poor old father of his only son, the cherished hope and support of his feeble and failing years? Shall I show you the lord whose act made one horrid sacrifice of all the noblest born in the wide land, one dreadful sweep of fell assassination of every ancient house of Mexico? Behold him on yon terrace, he who was once Montezuma! once the monarch of the Aztec empire! once the beloved of all his people! once my uncle! of whom my heart was proud, whose beck was the mandate of a million—now the vile slave who cringes at the Christian's feet, lays down his crown and delivers the sceptre of empire into the hands of Cortes! Men of Mexico, you are all sold! slaves to the Spanish host who holds yon citadel! sold by yon trembling, treacherous traitor! Gods of my sires! is there no hand to hurl him from yon height? is there no arm to strike the traitor dead? Yes, land of my birth, there is a blow reserved for the freedom of Mexico—and Montezuma's heart!"

With this the glittering javelin was poised, and flew flashing aloft from Guatemozin's hand, and, with unerring aim, the fatal barb pierced the pale monarch, and he fell into the arms of his courtiers in attendance. A yell arose from the swarm of Aztecs in an instant, and a shower of stones and arrows poured upon the

king ; a body of Christians rushed forward in the midst of the pelting storm, and throwing their shields as a cover over the unfortunate monarch, bore him hastily out of sight and the reach of danger.

Again the roaring din of battle rose, and the dusky warriors of Tlascala clashed in conflict with the Mexicans, while here and there a handfull of Christians would be holding equal combat with a host whose numbers would be countless ; and thus, with sharp assaults, bold defences, and flying skirmishes, the day as usual fading away in red and black shadows, would behold troop after troop of the Aztecs retiring from the streets. When darkness closed upon the day, all sounds of warfare would be hushed, and the city would seem to sleep as if the angels of night and peace stood upon the temple, and waved their hands over her thousand silent palaces.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN a palace facing upon one of the great canals, in the lone hours of the night, when the tapers waxed dim, and naught was heard from without save the wings of the wind, as they flapped the reed and feather-latticed window, sat Malmiztic, Cuitlahua, Guatemozin, Tecuiclipa and Tecalco in deep and earnest conversation.

"Oh, Guatemozin," said Tecuiclipa, "it was a rash act, indeed it was a cruel deed."

"The time demanded such a sacrifice," returned the person whom she addressed.

"Nay," she answered, "nay, Guatemozin, but not by thy hands. If Montezuma must fall, it should have been by any arm but thine; remember how he hath cherished you in days long past.

"Ay," replied the other, with a rapid tone of voice, "I remember well how he has cherished me; it is graven, sculptured, on my heart; it is the cherishing the wolf gives the lamb—the favor of the hawk to the wild fowl. But I could have forgiven him this; nay, though he had thwarted my love for thee, yet knowing Cuitlahua would strive to make thy happiness as complete as my own deep love could make it, I yielded without a murmur. I bore the arrow quivering in my heart, although its pangs consumed me; I heaved the heart-felt sigh, but my lips complained not. I did not reproach Montezuma for the deep wound he had inflicted upon me, but silently submitted to the hard decrees of fate."

"Yes, Guatemozin," replied the princess, "but remember thou hast inflicted a bodily wound upon him more deep and lasting than the loss of a simple girl like me could make upon thy heart. Ah! couldst thou return a wrong so foully?"

"Nay," replied the other with intense emotion; "I would not have had thee snatched from me for his diadem, nay, not for forty thousand crowns like it; but Cuitlahua, my uncle, loved thee, and here, in his presence, I say from my heart, I loved him not the less therefor; I bore him not a thought of ill, that he should love thee thus. He saw thee as I did, and loved thee like myself; he was worthy of thee, though then I scarcely knew his worth, but thy father—thy father, Tecuiclipa, struck not at me alone in this; had he shivered the very heart of my affection, like an itzli mirror, scattered in a thousand fragments, it would have been a blow which a single grave would have covered; it would have been buried with my body, and forgotten by the world, who never knew its poison pains. But he has blotted out an empire in an instant—he has fled like a frightened priest from the altar of his gods; he has stained the proud escutcheon of a line of kings with cowardice; he has dipped the scroll of our nobility in a pool of blood, and drained a scarlet sea of slaughter out of the common heart of the Aztec race. Tecuiclipa, was it not time to send him to the shadowed valley of the dead?"

"Nay, Guatemozin," replied the princess, "though he had sold our empire to the infidel, and our people into bondage and captivity; though wrong should have accumulated daily upon his head, thy hand should not have struck the murderous blow. I did love you once, Guatemozin, but thou hast broken my heart—Guatemozin, thou hast killed my father! thou hast hurled a barb at his breast, and pierced deep into mine! My father! my father! farewell! and thou, Guatemozin, likewise farewell; let us not meet again, for I shall see blood upon thy hands—my father's blood! farewell!"

Tecuiclipa rushed from the room followed by Cuitlahua, Guatemozin gazing a moment after them with an expression of unutterable anguish, clasped both hands upon his pale brow, and falling upon his knees, burst into a flood of irrepressible tears. Malmiztic and Tecalco rose at the same instant and supported him upon either hand to a cushioned lounge. Tecalco stooped, pushed back the black mass of hair which had fallen over his pallid brow, and wiping the tear-drops from his large, sad eyes, imprinted a kiss upon his cold cheek.

"Do you too not hate me, Tecalco?" inquired he, looking up strange and mournfully.

"No, Guatemozin," said Tecalco, in her soft, harmonious accents, "I love thee, love thee fondly, with a sister's purest love. Calm thyself, my father lives; he is but wounded; a slight, a simple wound; 'twill heal to-morrow. Brush away these tears, they are not for men, they are made for woman's eyes. My father will be soon abroad; he is well now; a scratch of a javelin; not more than the prick of an aloe thorn. Come, come, Guatemozin, let not my sister's weakness and folly unman thee; be more thyself, or else thy friend, Malmiztic, will rate thee but a girl."

"Malmiztic! Malmiztic here?" said Guatemozin, musingly, as if suddenly recollecting himself, "Malmiztic, my wise and noble friend, dost thou condemn me?"

"Not I," said the Toltec, firmly, and encouragingly. "Nay, though you had strung up tyrants' heads as thick as the skulls which stand in the Tzompantli, I would not lay a hair's weight of blame upon your heart. No, boy, you have pierced the skin of one with a flake of obsidian, whose pusillanimity has blackened Tenochtitlan with corpses. He was thy uncle, Tecuiclipos's father, Tecalco's father—were he forty times dearer than ever father were to child, and thus desert his country and his kin, not this scratch, but all the deaths that he could die, could not redeem his forfeited fate, or reinstate the empire on its seat. Why are the walls of this city black? Why hangs the dark cloud of gloom upon the brows of a thousand widows and orphans? Who widowed them? and who left the infant fatherless?—Montezuma. He who has paid the penalty by a trivial flesh-wound, when years of pain as countless as the leaves in Xochimilco's vale would fail to expiate his foul and damnable offence. And who spread the gorgeous banner of our nation to the sunshine and the breeze? Who rushed with it amid the suffocating smoke, and cannon thundering death around his way? Who bared his blade in battle, and leading on the combat, flew to the close conflict, crying, 'Mexico forever!' Who, with his royal standard and drooping eagle crest, led the way, and filled his followers' hearts with hope, and sent a death-chill to the foeman's soul? Guatemozin,

yea, Guatemozin ! he who a moment since fell pale and trembling before a woman's words—Guatemozin, he who deserves his nation's love forever ; he whose patriot soul, instead of shrinking before the Christian's might, calls upon the mountains and the vales to pour forth their power for their country's cause. Then rouse thee, noble man, for thou hast had the courage to strike at a monarch, who, like a deadly disease corrupted the body of this glorious country. Yes, thou hast aimed the blow, even knowing it would cut one of thy own heart-strings in the stroke ; but the traitor yet is spared, couldst thou have transfixed him where he stood, and set thy native land free from her thralldom, instead of being a theme for grief, it would have made thy name as shining and imperishable with futurity, as the white immortal peak of lofty Orizaba. No, Guatemozin, let not thy soul be sorrowful ; if ever honor lit the warrior's shield, it burns on thine ; if ever patriot soul had cause for pride, that soul is thine, which, bursting through the common ties of kindred blood, strikes for a nation and a nation's rights ! If ever warrior's name were honorable, 'tis thy desert ; and if it is ever justified to strike aside the white angel wing of peace, and spread forth the scarlet pinions of war, it is when aggression sends her swarming legions to desolate the holy happiness of home !”

While these parties were thus conversing within the palace, two figures glided along the bank of the canal under the shadow of the night, and stood gazing in at a window, which was screened by a thick, creeping honeysuckle. These two persons stood in silence, and listened attentively to the speakers within ; they were Spanish cavaliers, and under their short military cloaks casings of mail could be seen covering their bodies and legs ; they waited quietly until the party within the palace had concluded their conversation, and then, with cautious footsteps, moved away along the bank of the canal towards their quarters. After they had turned through many streets one broke the silence and exclaimed :

“By Santiago ! is she not supremely beautiful ? Thou hast roamed through the vine-covered valleys of Andalusia, and hast seen the dark-eyed damsels who dwell amid the olive groves of Grenada ; now, say, Sandoval, hast thou ever seen a more angelic face ?”

"Truly, Alvarado," replied his companion, "her beauty is wondrous—how fairly heaven's hand hath fashioned the young heathen. But did you note that dark heathen who stood by her?"

"Ay, by the Cross," replied Alvarado, "if I mistake not from the vague glimpse which I caught, it was that villain who struck my sword from out my hand in the plaza of the great temple."

"Ay, truly," answered Sandoval, "and that magnificent female who left the room was the other daughter of the emperor—she who was queen at the festival of flowers. By my faith, I can scarce decide which I do most admire, the one for her loveliness, or the other for her majesty. But I fear me that he who would win either of them will have some trouble with that knightly infidel, Guatemozin, or that strange mystic, who, like some mighty Egyptian astrologer, sways an influence among these people like the hand of destiny itself."

"By the bones of the martyrs," returned Alvarado, "I wish no better field for knighthood to display itself than in defeating these heathens, and especially this sorcerer, who holds his spell upon this exquisite princess. I will pluck her like a flower from heathen soil, and plant her in the bosom of Castile. I will snatch her like a glowing cactus flower, though guarded by a thousand thorns."

"Why, Alvarado," returned Sandoval, "thou wilt risk thy life, sayest thou? Beware! they are dangerous foemen who guard this first flower of the Aztecs."

"I will beware," replied Alvarado; "but, mark me, Sandoval, that girl is mine, and 'as surely as we depart from this city, I bear her with me; remember, with the favor of St. James and this trusty friend, she is mine;" and so saying, the Spanish knight struck his hand against the hilt of his sword, and entering the precincts of the palace of Axajacatl, gave the word to the sentinel, and they passed in.

The day god threw his blaze of gold along the chain of silver lakes, and the grey mist spread its wings on the blue sky and vanished in the distance as the morning advanced. On top of the great temple, which entirely commanded the whole of the surrounding buildings, and overlooked especially the quarters of the

Christians, were assembled full five hundred of the Mexican nobles, fortified in this upper area of the temple, and armed with all the arms of the Aztecs, from whence they opened their fire upon the camp of Cortes, with a galling effect. Scarce could a Spaniard appear, before a shower of missiles would rain upon and around him ; in at every aperture of the ancient palace they poured a stream of arrows ; no window or port-hole could be protected, for the storm pelted every face which made its appearance ; and after hours of this harassing assault, the Christians made an attempt to issue forth in a body, but instantly a storm of stones rattled, thick as the hail in a hurricane, upon the flat roof of the castle. The torrent was tremendous. At length, Cortes sent a captain, by the postern gate, with a body of a hundred soldiers, to make a circuit round the palace and dislodge the enemy from the upper area of the temple. Thrice did the Spaniards approach, and thrice were they as vigorously repulsed ; they resolutely came forward, but the Aztecs repelled them by sheer force from the base of the temple. Again the Christians came on, but their success, notwithstanding their obstinate resolution, was not greater than before, and their stoutest efforts to carry the way up the great staircase, was unavailing, for, upon their approach, heavy objects were hurled at them from the top, whence they fell with tremendous and destructive force. Despite, therefore, of his utmost efforts, the Spanish captain was compelled to return to the quarters, and report to Cortes the impossibility of carrying the temple.

Cortes, upon hearing this, and seeing the danger that would arise from remaining in his present exposed position, determined, at last, to essay in person, and attempt with his troops to capture it.

With this resolve, he tied his shield upon his arm, the hand of which had been wounded in a late battle, and led the way towards the temple. At the very foot of the stairs they were met by the Aztecs, who were chiefly nobles, and again the conflict commenced. It was strongly contested for every inch, but yet the Christians made head against the foe, and, step by step, they mounted the stairs, although a fierce opposition was maintained by the Aztecs, who thronged the way and barred the progress

of their opponents. Suddenly a crowd would press upon the Christians, and bear them back by their overpowering weight and numbers, crowding them down the steps by their ponderous pressure. But Cortes led the way with indomitable valor, and, notwithstanding the lame condition of his left hand, and the resolute resistance of the swarming enemy, flight after flight was gained, for the iron-armed soldiers of the Cross fought furiously; and when, at length, after their long and desperate struggle, they gained the broad, flat area on the top of the temple, they gave a shout of "Santiago!" that made the air ring—to which the Aztecs replied with a yell of fearful wildness. Then came the burst of battle, fierce and terrible, hand to hand, and man to man, sword and shield, steel and copper, glittering Toledo blades, and the black, flashing *itzli*, swords and *maquahuitls*, armor of iron and corselet of dried hide, silver, and even breast-plates of gold.— Loud rang the blows, and fierce was the cry of contending hosts; room for retreat, there was none—and contest to the death was the only course. Face to face they fought, and died even where they stood; with every one it was the death resolve, to conquer there or die—to pass in triumph over his prostrate enemy, or fall at that enemy's feet a corse. Loud rose the clash and clang of warlike implements, as with the rage of furies they fought on, without an instant slackening the terrific carnage. The cinnamon-faced Aztec met the bearded, olive complexioned Castilian, and, in an instant, their faces were spotted with blood, as they rushed upon each other, with reckless but heroic courage. A forest of swords and *maquahuitls* rose, flourished, and fell every moment. A voice would cry, "Mexico! Mexico!" or "Santiago! Santiago!" and in another instant, that loud voice would be mute, and the being who breathed it would be a bloody and mangled corse, amid the slain, who thickly strewed the whole top of the temple. For hours the stormy conflict raged—three long hours, hand to hand, upon the temple's top—and yet the panting foes struck fierce and fast, as they planted their feet in the crimson lake, formed by the life-blood of their mutual companions.

The host of Aztecs was by far the greater, but the hardy Christians, inured to fields of fight, flagged not in their endurance, but

closed with each fresh foe as if the combat were just begun. There was a fearful vigor in each stroke, which nothing but a man of iron could resist, and Cortes at their head, with his single arm, seemed like a fiend let loose, so fell his swoops, and so unchecked his course. Lances and brittle blades shivered on his shield, while with his fierce, grey-eagle eye flashing right and left with vivid glance, he strode on, and made the stoutest quail and shrink before him; the might of fifty cavaliers centred in his single arm, and in spite of all restraint his followers pressing at his heels, forced the dusky foemen back to the outer wall, from whence many, sorely wounded, desperately threw themselves with a wild leap off the giddy height, and went whirling through the air, until they struck the rocky sides far below, and were dashed to pieces by the terrific fall. Still the career of Cortes and his comrades knew no pause. If his soldiership and terrible prowess had ever been questioned, startling proofs were not now wanting, for he performed prodigies of valor every instant, at which his astonished followers burst forth in cries of admiration, "Cortes! Cortes forever," while the appalled nobles of Mexico shrank back, and one exclaimed, "God of Battles! the Fiend fights against us." Panic spread amidst the Aztecs, and many sprang madly over the wall. "Turn, maniacs! Aztecs to the stairway, and save yourselves!" spake a voice like a trumpet in the midst of the uproar, and instantly the remaining Mexicans made a desperate rush for the flight of stairs, and Cortes rushing upon the speaker, came full upon the broad, majestic face and frame of Malmiztic. He paused an instant, then struck a terrific blow at the Toltec. At that moment a stroke from the lightning blade of Malmiztic shattered the helmet upon the head of Cortes, and he fell apparently lifeless upon the flat, bloody stone of the temple-top. Instantly two Christians seized the powerful Toltec, one by each arm, but with the rapidity of a thought, and might of a giant, he hurled them both with superhuman force, in the flash of an eye, far over the wall, and they fell headlong below, and the Toltec dashed toward the stairway, and in spite of all opposition, descended to the base and disappeared.

In the meantime, two of the Aztecs, in a fit of mad desper-

tion, rushed upon Cortes, and grappling him with their hands by his arms, began dragging him with the power of maniacs, towards the outer verge of the wall. The Spanish commander immediately comprehended his perilous position. He beheld destruction staring him full in the face, and he rapidly approaching it, despite of all resisting efforts. A fiendish joy overspread the countenances of the two as they dragged him on, and the remaining Aztecs made a bold and sudden rush forward, which cut off Cortes from the protection of his party. Hitherto the life of Cortes had been spared in battle, by the desire upon the part of the enemy to take him alive, and make him a sacrifice, but now they had him near the altar of their gods, and it was glorious to die as martyrs, when they destroyed the monster who desolated their native land. Fiercely and firmly they grappled Cortes, and swiftly they dragged him towards the terrible verge of the wall ; stoutly he struggled, but in vain. Away they pulled him, and their bright eyes gleamed like fire, as they clenched tightly upon his arms. Quick jerks and strong pulls were alike fruitless ; they bore him irresistibly on. His nerves quivered as he struggled violently in their powerful grasp. At this instant his eye caught a glance of the frightful distance which yawned below. He grew giddy at the vast height, and that fearful depth struck him almost blind with dizziness, as he reeled backwards close to the awful brink—tighter and tighter they grappled him, and he grew almost powerless, as with a lift they strove to heave him beyond the edge of the parapet, and free themselves of his grasp. Cortes, a moment before, almost paralyzed with weakness, now, as by magic, summoned superhuman strength ; his muscles tightened like tense-drawn wires, and with a tremendous surge he snatched his right arm from one of his antagonists, and pushed him backwards over the wall. The falling Aztec seized with a death-gripe upon the leg of Cortes, as he hung over the parapet, and his weight almost drew the Spaniard after him ; but Cortes having his right hand free, struck the Aztec, as he hung dangling on the outside of the wall, a full blow upon the crown, and the tenacious Mexican dropped, feet foremost, downward, until he struck the sharp corner of the temple, far below. The

moment that Cortes was thus liberated from one of his foes, he turned upon the other, with that new confidence and vigor which made the resistance of the opponent appear feeble and ineffectual. The Aztec still held him by the lame arm, and when Cortes wheeled upon him, he struck a blow full in the face of the Aztec, which felled the latter as if thunder-smitten. By this time the Christians had entirely overpowered and slaughtered the remnant of the Mexicans, who had vainly striven to maintain their position, and now not an Aztec remained alive of the host of five hundred nobles, who that morning had assailed the quarters of the Christians, and it was high noon when Cortes and his companions fired the Holy Sanctuary of Mexitli, and as its lurid blaze ran up the sky, towering with its yellow tongues of flame towards heaven, the Christians collected their fallen comrades, who were found to be six and forty; with which bodies they descended from the pyramid of the temple, and returned to their quarters.

The soul of Cortes was fevered and restless, and that night he sallied forth with his troops, and marching into the most beautiful part of the city, began to touch the fiery torches to the elegant edifices. Roof after roof began to redden and glow; the dry and odorous cedar timber, and other aromatic woods, emitted a powerful perfume, as they kindled into a bright blaze. Flame after flame burst forth and crimsoned the sable sky. Long, bright lances of light quivered behind columns of smoke, and amid the black masses, wave after wave of fire rolled slowly away, as the night wind curled their yellow and scarlet crests, and swept them from pile to pile, until full three hundred houses sent up a lurid glow over the whole city, and threw a vast, red glaring shadow upon the dark bosom of the lake, and all night long, sparks which ten thousand times outnumbered the stars, hurried aloft in the atmosphere, until the air gleamed with flakes of fire. Huge billows of flame rolled hot and fiercely over stately palaces and dwellings, whose beautiful architecture and ornaments had been the pride and admiration of the Aztecs, and the wonder of the surrounding nations. All night long the fire cracked, and the smoke rolled up; the great timbers would

fall in from time to time, with a crash—the mighty walls mouldered away, and the grey ashes thickly overspread the gardens, parks and pavements of the streets. When the morning dawned, it was a black and melancholy wreck—a mass of smouldering ruins, where the red fiend of conflagration had reveled around the funeral pyre of architectural beauty and magnificence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE next day Cortes attempted the causeway towards Iztapalapan, on which there were seven bridges which spanned the sluices connecting the waters of the lake. As soon as he had sallied forth, the usual horde attacked him, but he drove them before him, until the Christians arrived at the first bridge. Here the opposition of the enemy became more decided, and his progress was not only checked, but his men harassed sorely. Nevertheless, he forced his way on to the second bridge, where the opposing party thronged thickly, and lined the side of the causeway with their water-craft, filled with bowmen. In the distance upon the lake floated a fleet of boats, with awnings upon reeds of red cotton, dyed with the bright cochineal. But the armed men in vessels ran close to the rocks of the causeway, and poured their showers of arrows and stones from slings upon the Cavaliers and their companions. The Spaniards now gained the third bridge, and the conflict grew sharp and severe. The enemy pressed more and more close; hundreds clambered from the boats upon the causeway, and thronged the whole space before the Christians, inasmuch as not a foot could be gained by Cortes, save at the point of the sword. Hours of hard battling would only advance the Spaniards a few yards, and thus the whole day dragged heavily on, and the setting sun was shooting his golden arrows in level lines over the surface of the lake, when Cortes carried the fourth bridge of the causeway, and the enemy, weary of the tedious fight, withdrew gradually, while Cortes, whose success was not less fatiguing, was well satisfied to return to his quarters in the city, to recruit the strength of his troops, whom fasting and fighting had almost worn out and exhausted; but upon the following day, the indefatigable Cortes was again upon

the causeway, and carried, amid the same stormy opposition, the remaining three bridges, and reached the main land.

At this time, news came that the Mexicans would desist, if the high priest, who had been captured by the Spaniards, were given up ; and Cortes, accordingly, liberated the arch idolater. This proved to be a mere stratagem on the part of the Mexicans, for scarcely was there a cessation of hostilities, when news came that the bridges were re-taken ; whereupon the Spaniards, under their untiring leader, again, upon the succeeding morning, sallied forth, and after the most stubborn and dogged resistance, the Aztecs were compelled to yield bridge after bridge, until at last Cortes had captured every post upon the entire causeway.

But now, new troops came in to the enemy so fast that Cortes was compelled to abandon his position, and commence a retreat. One of the bridges was recovered from the Christians, and their force driven back to a second bridge, from thence to a third, and in defiance of the most deadly and determined defence, the fourth one was wrested from the power of the Christians ; and thus, after falling back all day long, from sluice to sluice, they beheld bridge after bridge fall into the hands of the natives, and themselves suffering the most severe losses.

In vain their valor won a position, for countless numbers crowded them out ; and thus, after so many days of fruitless exertion, Cortes became convinced of the impossibility of contending against hosts, who seemed to rise from the earth as fast as they were felled—if he swept a legion to the realms of death, at nightfall, the morning broke upon a myriad in their places, whose courage was as undaunted, whose maquahuitls as glittering, and whose banners as multiplied and gay, as though death had not blackened the banners of their companions with blood on the foregoing day. The enemy had re-taken all the bridges, and Cortes, with his people, returned to his quarters, weary, dispirited, melancholy, and wounded—sore of body and sick at heart.

In the meantime, Montezuma had lain in the ancient palace, pierced by the wound of the javelin, but deeper still by the pangs of a broken heart. In vain they dressed his wound, day after day he tore the bandage off, and cast the healing salves which

were given him away—his was the wounded mind, which no medicament can heal—this was the barb which, drawn from the heart, brings the life-blood with it. Father Olmedo came to his bedside, day after day, and conjured him to embrace the cross of the Christian faith, as the only hope in the wreck of life to which man could cling in the rushing cataract of death, and gain the shores of heaven. But the Aztec could not be persuaded; the faith of his forefathers still was uppermost in his mind; Christianity had opened no realm of light to him; the only glimpses which he caught of its meaning were vague and shadowy, and Father Olmedo's beads and crosses, were unmeaning types of chimerical visions. Hour after hour, the thin face of the monarch grew more wan, the spectral paleness, which foretokens dissolution, and as the fatal time drew near, the earnest prelate urged the emperor to relinquish the wild dreams of the Aztec faith, and seek salvation by the blood of the Lamb. But in vain did the holy father dwell upon the bliss of heaven, and the horrors of hell, the necessary fate of the self-willed sinner, Montezuma heeded him not; the early impressions upon his mind were seated there, rooted, fixed, an unalterable belief, the shadows of the mind gazed upon so long, that they became realities. The needless task was tried in vain, Montezuma was no proselyte; the awful pallor of the king of shade fell upon his countenance; the bright, black eye was dimming fast; the few attendants, whom Cortes allowed him to keep, stood silently around his couch, watching the moment when the spirit would vacate the tenement of clay on its invisible wings, in search of the land of Micoalt, or the Path of the Dead.

By slow degrees, he faded like a fading light, and over his dark eyes a thin film began to creep, and as each breath grew less and less, that film closed over the lake of the eye, glazing its mysterious depths with an icy glass—all was, still, still—the deep silence of death, the noiseless hush, more awful than all the sounds of terror on the earth.

The Christian commander came in and gazed upon the yet warm corse; a thousand emotions rushed through his heart;—before him lay the innocent victim of his ambition—the monarch whose realm he had usurped—the man whose forbearance and

gentleness had protected him against the wrath of an outraged people—the man upon the keeping of whose person he had held the empire in restraint and subjugation—the emperor whom he had robbed of wealth which outshone “Ormus or Ind,” robbed him of his realm, of his liberty, and lastly, in effect, of life—and now, he beheld him before his eyes, a broken-hearted king, a royal corse, from whose head he had struck a crown, the blazing brilliancy of which would have dazzled the bearer of the richest diadem in Europe. And the companions of Cortes, who stood with him around the regal death couch, saw dark and gloomy shades creep over the face of Hernando Cortes—a look of melancholy and unutterable woe—a perplexity of spirit ready to burst forth in deep grief, but restrained by great efforts.

The sad news spread through the city, as if every wind whispered it, and it fell like the pall of night upon the palace ; hosts hurried to the Christian camp to beg cessation of hostilities, and the nobles came to demand the body of their emperor. Cortes was in no mood to refuse either, nor did he conceive his interests demanded that he should give denial to their desires.

Accordingly the Aztecs prepared to perform the funeral services. They were celebrated with all the grand solemnities of their religion ; a body of nobles bore upon their shoulders all that remained of their once great monarch ; it was in a litter of state, ornamented with the most gorgeous insignia of his royalty ; his arms and banners followed, draped with signs of mourning, and following came his household and family, some clothed in white and others in black robes, either of which were deemed fit material for mourning ; then came sad, wild music, breathing forth a melancholy wail for the departed, and as the touching notes swelled long and sorrowfully forth, tears started from thousands of eyes among the unending multitude, who followed their monarch to his last resting-place, which was within an exquisite and most enchanting grove, whose leafy shade was in the very heart of the city. Here the vast assemblage saw the final rites and ceremonies performed upon the body of their emperor, ere it was entombed in its final resting-place. From this the innumerable hosts passed through all the thoroughfares of the great city, singing death-dirges and uttering strange and mournful cries.

One general gloom overspread everything ; every face was dark ; the voice of tribulation alone broke the deadly calm and general silence of the city. The faults of the king were forgiven in death, and his memory was hallowed by regret.

But if the hearts of the Mexicans were heavy, that of Cortes was doubly so ; and it soon became apparent that the only bond of amity, which had existed between the Aztecs and Spaniards, was broken—that link was the emperor, who yet had a few friends, who, faithful to his order, preserved a staunch neutrality ; but now, even these, Cortes could observe, had become fearfully incensed of late, and stood ready, now that their king was gone, to revenge his cause. A terrible and tumultuous storm the discreet eye of Cortes could clearly see brewing ; the mass of thousands was in a strange ferment, and that it would be impossible to maintain his position in the city, when all the inhabitants were opposed to him, and his supplies becoming daily more precarious.

With this view of matters, he called a council in his quarters, by night, to hear the opinions of his comrades in regard to evacuating the city. The great part of them were anxious once more to see their homes and make a report of the vast fortunes which they had acquired in the city of the Aztecs and the golden realm of Mexico ; some were for starting forthwith ; others wished preparation ; and even those soldiers who had been fully equipped in an hour's notice to travel, had now become so burthened with plunder that days would be required to arrange it. Some advocated the policy of marching out in the open day, saying that there would be no opposition ; but others, distrusting the present false quiet, were in favor of leaving by night ; and of this party the most zealous was Botello, the pseudo-astrologer ; he had been watching and fasting for some time, and performing a world of mystical incantations ; he had been repeating cabalistic spells, and the fame of his conjurations had gone abroad among the soldiery to so great an extent, that many of them fully believed that he held communication with spirits of the outer world, and was acquainted with the mysteries of the ancient magi. The noblest minds may often be imbued with a tinge of superstition, and notwithstanding the character of Cortes, as a Christian, he was fully persuaded that there might be certain hidden powers which could

be commanded, and although he entertained a contempt for Botello, in person, yet, as to the agencies with which the astrologer might be connected, it would have been inconsistent with the spirit of the age to have set them all down as inventions and chimeras.

Finding a large majority of the council determined to depart, Cortes allowed himself to be persuaded by Botello to start upon the night of the next day, which would be the first of July—the arch dissembler pretending that he had a revelation to the effect that such would be the auspicious time ; and further, that the Aztecs would not fight by night. This last argument, founded upon apparent reason and experience, struck Cortes with great force, especially in coming with what seemed so vague and charlatan like in the way of prophecy, upon the part of Botello. Accordingly it was determined upon to adopt the advice of the pretending astrologer, and preparations were made to start by night upon the first of July.

Great was the hustle in the Christian camp, and among their allies, the Tlascalans, when it became known that Cortes had determined to depart. Out of the immense mass of gems and gold which had been acquired in the city, the general set aside a portion to the crown of Spain, and a fifth to his own use ; the remainder he disbursed among his soldiery—not without much bickering and complaint at what they considered the extreme narrowness of their commander, in suggesting to them to take but little, and to be warned of overburthening themselves ; his advice was far from being adopted, for the greedy soldiery, seizing upon all that was allowed them, loaded not only their camp equipage, but their clothes and persons, with heavy masses of gold and ponderous riches, which had from time to time fallen into their hands ; their horses were laden, and their saddles were packed with gold ; gold was concealed upon everybody and in everything ; the very cooking utensils of the camp were filled with precious bars and lumps ; rich emeralds and diamonds were strung upon the dresses of the troops, like buttons. In short, no place could be found wherein to stuff a piece of gold, or gems, in which it, or they, were not secreted.

Wonderful was the preparation which was made, in a short

time, in the camp of Cortes: arms were scoured and repaired; swords were brightened from their blood and rust; provision sacks were well looked to; and a thousand curious things were stowed away by the cavaliers, amid their rough wardrobes, as curiosities over which they could talk when they reached their homes, and tell old friends of their wondrous adventures in the splendid empire of the Aztecs. There were a thousand trophies which told a thousand tales—gems which had graced the crowns of infidel princes, and mementos of palaces stormed, and castles carried, by the stout cavaliers of Castile. Every horse was packed, and the sack of every soldier was stuffed, within the close quarters of the palace court-yard.

The night came on—it was a strange night, in appearance—a silent, dark, cloudy night—and the small rain never ceased falling; thick gloom hung upon everything, and sounds without the camp were hushed, save the soft and silver tinkling of the fine drops as they fell from the black sky upon the shadowed earth. At length, the Christians and their allies silently set forth towards Tlacopan. There were seven thousand Tlascalans who followed Sandoval, who led the van, and Cortes left Alvarado to bring up the rear; and thus their dark host moved on silently under the cover of the gloomy night.

While the Spaniards were thus preparing and moving, the Aztecs were far from idle; Guatemozin, Cuitlahua, and Malmiztic were congregating thousands upon thousands, in secret, and although the city was as quiet as a sepulchre, yet the whole capital was filled with warriors.

Tecalco had persuaded the Toltec to let her take the dumb dwarf of the cave into her keeping; to this Malmiztic, with some reluctance, consented, and the little intelligent creature had been brought to the city, where he soon acquired a knowledge of the state of feeling between all the members of Montezuma's family and relatives. Upon this night, the dwarf came to his mistress, with his beautiful face beaming with smiles, and communicated by signs he had found something for which Tecalco had been anxiously in search. She instantly enveloped herself in a loose veil, and followed in the deep darkness the footsteps of the dwarf, through many winding streets, until they came to an old and

almost ruined castle, around which were thick, green bushes and vines, wet with the falling rain; creeping through the fallen stones and among fragments of ruined pillars, they groped their way, sometimes stumbling in the darkness, to a great distance.

At length they came to what seemed to have been a large court-yard, and descended by a flight of broad steps; from this they entered a huge hall, which ran the entire length of the mighty skeleton of a castle, the pavement of which was of broad, broken stones, lying loose and irregular; and here the dwarf halted with Tecalco, and drew from his bosom a roll of cotton, out of which he took a small silver lamp and some material with which he instantly struck a flame; the lamp was lighted, and in a few moments they came to a door fastened with a heavy chain of copper; the dwarf pressed upon a secret spring in one of the links, and the door instantly flew open; the princess entered, and halted, struck dumb with amazement. The room was small and dark, and the walls were bare, grey stone; the light of the lamp flashed in upon the double gloom, and revealed a singular apparition—it was the strange, gaunt figure of a man whose eye, black and youthful, burned with an unearthly fire—a lustre too vivid for the living—but his head was white as the winter-bleached snow, and its hoary locks fell in long masses over his half-naked breast and shoulders; his face was wan and ghastly; there was a spectral stare in his look, as he gazed upon Tecalco; there was something strange and unnatural in this blending of a young, bright eye and unwrinkled brow, with a thin, skeleton form and hoary locks. The figure clasped both hands and exclaimed, with a hollow, sepulchral voice:

“Art thou spirit or flesh, mortal or angel? By the pale light of this strange fire, I do seem to have seen one like thee. If thou art living, thy name should be Tecalco.”

“Heavens! can it be Cacama!” replied the princess.

“Ay, that voice assures me, that remembrance has not deserted thy wretched cousin,” returned Cacama. “I am he who was once Cacama—once king of Tezcuco; you gaze upon me with surprise; in faith you may, for in good sooth I am strangely altered. But why, and how camest thou hither?”

"My dear cousin," replied Tecalco, "how I came matters not, be it enough that my mission is to give thee liberty."

"Liberty, sayest thou!" exclaimed the prince; "I had long since ceased to hope, and even now I scarce can think that freedom will be mine."

"Doubt not," said Tecalco, "but come with us at once."

"Once more free," murmured Cacama, musingly, "once more free! this is strange, indeed. Good angel, I bless thee—lead on."

With these words he kissed his beautiful guide, and they all departed out of the dungeon, and gained the street. The same thin rain was falling in darkness, and they hurried on through the silence of night. When passing along near the head of one of the causeways, a party of horsemen, catching a glimpse of the light which the dwarf bore, galloped suddenly upon them. The princess and Cacama secreted themselves behind a wall, which had been battered down by the cannon of the Christians; but despite the quick pursuit, the dwarf and his lamp disappeared like a will-o'-the-wisp, while other soldiers came up with lanterns, and searched around, but found nothing; and Alvarado, who led the party, was upon the point of relinquishing the pursuit, when the rays of his lamp fell upon the figures of Cacama and Tecalco, behind the rocks, where they crouched, breathless and trembling. Alvarado dismounted, and drawing his sword, commanded the parties whom he had discovered, to surrender. Cacama stooped, and picking a stone from the earth, threw it at Alvarado, and struck him upon his helmet with such force as to stun him for a moment, and Cacama instantly fled. In the dark it was almost impossible to see more than a few rods, and despite the immediate pursuit of the Spaniards, the Tezcuacan escaped; but Alvarado advanced to the princess, and lifting his lantern aloft, by its light discovered, to his inexpressible joy, that it was the late emperor's daughter. Calling a soldier with his steed, he mounted, and receiving the lovely girl in his arms, he pursued the way with his troops towards the causeway, where the main body were crossing the bridge, and making their way out of the city. The whole party were moving with silence on their course, and the dull, drizzling hum of the small rain, fell dreamily and

monotonously upon the ear. The footsteps of the soldiery, with irregular plash, beat upon the damp earth, and the horses' hoofs, along the entire line of the army, from Sandoval in the van to Alvarado in the rear, clattered occasionally upon the loose, broken stones which lay along the causeway, and now and then the iron with which they were shod would strike the stone, and sparks of fire would fly out for an instant in the darkness.

The march was a very crowded one, and the horde of Tlascalans pressed closely on after the Christians. The whole body of them were almost borne down by the oppressive burthen of their plunder. All the riches which they could collect, and all the goods upon which the eyes of cupidity could fix themselves, were being borne off by this avaricious caravan. The whole line of troops preserved so strict a silence, that the only voices which were heard, conversed in suppressed whispers. Universal gloom wrapped the lake and the land, and Cortes, knowing the opposition of the Aztecs to fighting by night, imagined very confidently that there would be no impediment to his outward passage. It was a strange stillness with which the whole great body moved forward, and gained the first bridge over the canal in the causeway, and passed quietly over it without the least resistance or appearance of danger. At this moment, when all was deep and dread silence, the wild and fearful notes of Guatemozin's horn was heard from the top of the temple, winding loud and terribly over the whole city, and echoing along the silent and gloomy shores of the lake. It was a strange and startling sound to burst forth amid the solemn shadows of midnight darkness; at such an hour, when nature seemed hushed, and the drowsy rain fell ceaselessly, that sound came awfully mysterious and thrilling. Listening, the quick ear of Cortes caught the accents of the high priest from his tower, crying, "To arms! to arms!" and almost simultaneously, he perceived they were surrounded by the dark hosts of Mexico, and forthwith the attack began. They had now reached the second ditch, and Cortes, with his usual foresight, anticipating that the bridges would be cut down, had provided himself with large portable bridges made of wood, over which he could transport his troops, horses, and baggage, together with the artillery, and all the munitions of war and equipage of camp.

At the second bridge the battle began with dreadful earnestness. The Aztecs rushed to the attack, as they had never done before. There was an unwonted fierceness in their assault, the effect of which was terrifically fatal, both to themselves and their foes; the confusion became fearful, but still Sandoval pressed forward, with that unquailing gallantry which scorned and defied the din and roar of battle, and the thick obscurity of the night. Right on he urged his way, but it was a fearful work; thick upon the causeway lay corpses, and the wounded were strewn all around the bank of the canal. Forward moved Sandoval, and following came the whole troop, and fiercely fought their way across the bridge. The heavy artillery, in its passage, buried the transporting bridges so deep in the black mud of the canal, that it was with difficulty that it could be extracted. Amid a shower of arrows and darts, which whistled through the night's Tartarean gloom, Sandoval reached the third canal. Again the bridge was broken, and only hanging by a few loose timbers. The intrepid Cavalier finding it impassable for his horse, dismounted, and led the animal by the bridle, while he proceeded, sword in hand, to attempt to find out some mode of passage across the canal. Bringing forward his axemen, he commanded them to cut away the props, and they did so, when the whole superstructure fell, with a tremendous splash, into the dark canal, and hundreds rushed to cross upon it, and by the time the first party were over, the crowd had so thickened upon it, that its timbers sank with them beneath the water. Frightful confusion followed, and in the midst of this disorder, the thronging Aztecs fell fiercely upon the Christians. It was a dreadful strife, and hand to hand they closed in the darkness, and many a death-grapple was had, as the combatants clinging to each other and fighting, fell over the edge of the causeway into the lake, or rolled furiously down, entangled, into the canal.—The high-spirited Cortes came up, and urging his stout steed forward, plunged boldly into the sluice; the powerful animal, snorting, heaved through the water, with crest erect, and his broad breast dashing the liquid element aside. Even amid the darkness and confusion, the Aztecs espied this horse and rider swimming the canal. Almost immediately a host of dark heads were around him, some clinging to his legs, some

to his saddle-skirts, and some with their hands fast in the flowing mane of the struggling steed. The swimmers swarmed around Cortes, and while swimming with one hand, they would deal blows from staves and maquahuitls with the other at the rider, but his steel-laced corselet, and well-tempered helmet, defied the might of those who rained their strokes upon him. At length the noble animal struck the farther bank of the canal, and despite of the stones and missiles which hailed upon him, he mounted the rocky sides, and came upon the causeway, pierced with fifty arrow-heads, but unbroken in his fiery spirit. Here Cortes found himself in the midst of a handful of Christians, who were contending with a numberless multitude of heathens, whose wild cries, in the dark, were dreadful, and in the water of the canal numbers were struggling and splashing in the gloom to reach the shore; and so direful was the carnage upon the brink of the canal that the host of Christians, Tlascalans and Aztecs that fell and rolled into the canal, had choked up the whole bed, until the living were even standing upon the dead in the water, and dealing death-strokes at each other. But despite the disorder and confusion, the aim of the Christians was still onward, and after a majority of the troops had crossed, an effort was made to bring over the artillery. The lighter armament was successfully moved across, but as the mass of Tlascalans came dragging on the heavy ordnance, the timbers of the bridge, which had already fallen, creaked and groaned beneath the ponderous load, and when the great guns had reached midway the bridge, one tremendous crash was heard, and the whole fabric snapped in two in the centre, and the heavy cannon sank instantly in the middle of the canal, and bearing down one end of the bridge, it carried with it numbers of both parties who were standing upon it, some contending, and others drawing on the artillery.

At length, by dint of strife and labor, the Spaniards and their auxiliaries effected a passage, and pursued their course on towards the next sluice, where the bridge was again gone, and the shores of the canal were of that soft, black mud which was almost quick-sand in many parts, and here in the dark they again essayed to lay one of their portable bridges across the deep, sluggish stream; but the opposition of the enemy rendered it

almost impossible, and the nature of the ground contributed to make the object a most difficult one to achieve. A constant clang and hum of battle struck upon the ear in the darkness, and the various cries which were used by the parties were the chief means by which the combatants could be distinguished. At this time, when Cortes and his officers were making the most vigorous efforts to arrange their troops and allies upon the causeway, the darkness of the night had grown more deep than ever. Every object had become so shadowed, that the face of friend or foe could not be distinguished, and only the dim outline of forms in the midst of the gloom, could be discerned. At this moment the wild peal of Guatemozin's horn again swelled forth terribly from the top of the great temple, and instantly, as by a work of magic, the whole pinnacle of the mighty temple became illuminated with one vast watchfire, whose brilliant burst of flame shot up into the black sky, and reddened the ebon roof above, while it threw a sheet of glowing crimson far down upon the city, and scattered a broad stream of ruddy light upon the midnight surface of the lake. The sight which the strange glare revealed to the eyes of Cortes and his companions, was appalling, for when the sable skies blushed, and the red shadow of the huge pyre flashed upon the bosom of the lake, it disclosed to their amazed vision, the whole face of the waters alive with boats filled with thousands upon thousands of dusky warriors, making their way fast towards the causeway and the Christians. The boats were numberless, and swarmed in every direction. As far as the eye could stretch they came crowding on—the quays, the canals, the reedy shores and the marshy margin of the lake appeared to move with their uncounted throng, and almost immediately the nearer craft commenced their attack upon Cortes and his comrades, and in a few moments they multiplied so fast around the Christians, that one continued rain of missiles was showered from the boats, until the Spaniards and Tlascalans were almost blinded by the terrific storm. The muskets of the Cavaliers blazed forth, and scattered the hosts, who climbed the causeway; but where the dead fell, countless living leaped up, and came thrice as thick in their places, and the water-craft lined thickly the rocky sides of the causeway and poured forth their legions upon the land, until the whole

embankment swarmed with living myriads, who rushed upon Cortes and his colleagues with such fiery assault that the Christians were completely overwhelmed and scattered—confusion and rout followed. Vainly did Cortes attempt to keep all of his troops and allies together, but they were broken to pieces, severed and separated in all directions; every division was cut off from the other; to stand against the infinite multitude was impossible; to retreat was equally so; and every step which they now advanced, as the light glared brightly, Cortes could see his companions fall, and the infuriate enemy clinging to them with frightful ferocity, and grasping the reins and the rider of every steed which charged along the causeway through the midst of the multitude.

By tremendous exertion, Sandoval gained and passed another canal, but could not with all his efforts extricate the temporary portable bridge which he had thrown over it; the timbers sank deep in the soft, black mud, and many lost their lives in the water or were dragged off by the enemy in the boats as they were struggling in the mire.

The parties were now divided, and Sandoval, finding the bridge inextricable, passed on without it, pushing the enemy before him at the point of the sword, until he was separated by a wide space from Cortes, who was closely beset by a multitude of the enemy, and fighting desperately, hand to hand, in the midst of a dreadful slaughter.

Far behind and beyond the bridge was Alvarado, with his soldiers battling stoutly, but vainly contending with the multitudinous foe. And now, the evil of their burthen of riches became apparent, for those who clung to their heavy baggage were cut down and fell sacrifices to their avarice. Thus thousands deserted pillage and countless others died attempting to defend their wealth, or fell in bearing it off; some staggered forward under a ponderous load, and fought until they were exhausted and overpowered by exertion or the enemy.

Cortes kept near the great mass of the treasure and guarded it, but from time to time he was compelled to relinquish portions of his rich spoil, and by degrees he beheld it diminishing rapidly, and every effort to protect it seemed fatal. Gold was the dead weight which dragged the soldiers down, and it was only when

their strength was almost entirely gone that they would abandon it. It was a strange struggle between life and gold, and fearful was the number who lost both. Many, who, tired out with their burthens, had thrown them away, finding themselves far behind their companions, made desperate but futile efforts to reach the company, and overpowered with numbers, sank beneath the blows of the Aztec enemy.

Everything was now disorder; the whole army was scattered along the causeway, in separate squadrons, and between them were hosts of the enemy, cutting the Christians and Tlascalans off from each other, and forcing them to fight in handfuls and hundreds against legions, whose number was incalculable. All the bright armor of the Spaniards was smeared and bloody, and thick mud clung upon them, which they had caught in passing the sluices; but still they strove manfully, yet their heroic prowess was unavailing, for the enemy seemed to gather and increase in numbers momentarily; in front and rear, right and left, on land and shore, in every place could the fiery eyes of the Aztecs be seen; and in every direction they poured a torrent of barbs, javelins, stones, and arrows, without cessation, upon the Tlascalans and the Spaniards, who, confused and desperate, knew not whither to turn in the darkness, for fear of falling at once in the hands of the foe. In the next instant the flame from the temple would flash forth, and they would behold themselves surrounded by hosts whose number seemed a death-blow to all hope of opposition or escape.

Thus passed the hours of the mournful night, amid carnage, shouts, shrieks, groans, the clang of arms, the rush of men and horses, the wild confusion, the dismay and despair of bewildered and hope-forsaken men. Far in the van, brave Sandoval breasted the night-storm, and led his decimated followers on, cheering them with the hope that the main-land might yet be reached.—Behind him, in the distance, came the courageous Cortes; in the red glare of the fire-light his countenance showed strangely; he was pale, but his eye shone with a wild and desperate fierceness; it was a look of despair half hidden by a deathless determination; his stroke was the fellest which came upon the enemy, and his shout sent a thrill home to the hearts of his desponding

followers;—around him the stalwart cavaliers thronged and dealt fatal blows in the face of the foe.

Lingering on the skirts of the army came Alvarado, far in the rear and surrounded by a swarming myriad of Mexicans, who poured upon him and his troops the whirlwind of their rage; loudly they yelled and roared around him; heads came up over the bank of the causeway in thick masses, and pressing on behind came a cloud of warriors that darkened the night as they crowded on hotly after Alvarado and his men, as well as their auxiliaries. The terrified Tlascalans, who had fought nobly in the earlier part of the night, now were so panic stricken by their hopeless situation, that they ran madly and plunged headlong into the lake, and the dark waters closed over them. All efforts to rally them, upon the part of Alvarado, proved fruitless; away they fled, and precipitated themselves over the causeway, or ran unwittingly on and were transfixd by the sharp spears of their adversaries. Around the impulsive and fiery Spaniard there stood now but a handful of Christians, but they were men of steel; for five long hours had they fought the foe face to face, and yet they flinched not—they fell, but fell fighting, dropping upon the stones, and still fighting when they were down.

Alvarado fought on upon his powerful black mare, and still held in his arms before him the beautiful Tecalco, over whom he had thrown his shield, while with the same hand he guided his courser, and with a tremendous broadsword in the other, he slashed right and left, making horrid havoc wherever his trenchant blade fell.

But still the multitude increased in number and rage; fresh legions pouring in perpetually, charged upon the wreck of a division who yet remained with Alvarado, and with such disastrous effect, that half the handful who were left tell—and the rest, in mad desperation, rushed into the midst of the Aztecs, determining to sell their lives as dearly as possible. Thus man after man departed and fell, until there stood by Alvarado but a single, stern old soldier, a grey-headed veteran, who had followed the fortunes of Alvarado from his most youthful adventures.

“Tecalco!” shouted an Aztec, as he flourished a burning torch before the head of Alvarado’s horse. “Tecalco, where?”

echoed a voice which Alvarado recognized at once as belonging to Malmiztic; and in an instant the broad, dark form of the Toltec appeared by the red light blazing from the temple, close by the side of Alvarado's horse, with his electric blade flashing in his hand.

"Ah, he!" said Alvarado, "then the moon of my fortune is waning and losing herself in the gloomy clouds of this night.—Here, Juan, take my horse, and fly with this damsel; remember that she is a princess, and if thou lovest me, mount, and hie away with her."

"What!" exclaimed the old man, to Alvarado, who had dismounted, "leave thee! I, who have followed thy fortunes so far, fly from thee now! No, never! I cannot, I will not desert thee!"

"Nay," replied the other, "we waste words—the foe is upon us—in the name of God and the Virgin, I command you, go!—As you would do a favor to your captain, as you would execute his last request, lose not an instant—save the princess, and I will save myself—fly, and bid Cortes succour me; remember that is my only hope of salvation!"

"What! shall I leave thee?" said the soldier.

"Away, and not a word more!" said Alvarado, half lifting the old man into the saddle, and lightly swinging the form of Tecalco up before the grey-headed veteran. "God speed thee," he cried, as the powerful black mare leaped away with the old man and his charge in spite of the throng which surrounded them.

"Now, infidels and devils, come on!" cried Alvarado, as he turned upon those who were rattling darts and arrows against his steel bonnet and close-riveted armor; "and you, dark night-raven!" said he, as he came in an instant face to face with Malmiztic, "I have a reckoning to make with you. Now, Christ and Santiago, aid me, a poor defender of the Cross, against thee, thou sable-robed son of Satan. Life or death! Spain or Mexico! have at you!"

And with these words, he darted towards the Toltec, and their swords met in the air with a sharp clang. The multitude fell back from the combatants, who dealt rapid blows at each other which made the sparks of fire glitter in the gloom. Right

manfully did the handsome Spaniard wheel his keen broadsword before him, and deftly did he catch the swift blows which were dealt at him. Now he sprang forward, and again he leaped back, to give or avoid a stroke ; and busy was his eye to ward and parry the sharp cuts and thrusts of his antagonist, who forced Alvarado to retreat step by step, until he had reached the brink of the causeway, where with a fell swoop upon his helmet the Spaniard fell and rolled over the embankment nearly to the edge of the water, stunned and apparently lifeless.

Malmiztic waited not a moment, but dashed on after the old soldier and Tecalco, who had reached one of the sluices or canals, and by the extraordinary power of the black mare were enabled to pass to the other side ; but here, the violent struggles of the animal, in attempting to mount the miry shore, only plunged it deeper in the soft, black mud. In every effort to extricate itself, the animal plunged violently, but the result was each time to weaken and sink the noble beast under the oppressive weight which it bore.

Numbers of the enemy now swarmed around those on horseback, in the midst of the water ; the Aztecs strove to sink the steed, and to pull the old Spaniard from his saddle. This they at last succeeded in, by force, and in spite of his desperate struggles, the old man, pierced by a hundred arrows, and cut fearfully in the head by a blow of a lance, from which the blood streamed into his eyes, grew giddy and faint from bleeding and weakness, and they dragged him into the dark and bloody waters, and in a few moments beads of foam came bubbling up from the spot where the grey head of the old man sank in the dark canal.

At this instant, Malmiztic reached the opposite side of the sluice, and seeing, through the dusky gloom of the red light, a white form floating upon the water, his quick thought divined it to be the princess, and instantly he sprang into the canal, half choked with dead bodies and living swimmers, and had just reached the spot where he had seen the figure before it disappeared. Sudden as an otter, his dark form descended where the body sank, and by chance he caught upon the loose robes of an object at the bottom of the stream, and grasping the form he rose to the surface. The lurid glare of the distant fire fell upon

the pale face of Tecalco! and Malmiztic's heart shrank within him, for death seemed in her countenance. A few powerful strokes brought the Toltec and his charge to the shore, where, upon the verge of the causeway, he poured the strangling water from her throat, pressed her chest, and rolled her body to and fro—but no spark of vitality appeared. Wildly he threw back her long, dripping tresses, and violently he chafed her form with his hands, and stared strangely into her motionless face; he pressed his cheek to her mouth—but there was no breath—he started half back, frantic, and again rapidly rubbed the body—but movement there was none. The Toltec clasped his brow with his hands, horror stricken; his large black eyes quivered in their sockets, as he gazed on the lovely but ghastly features before him. Suddenly he bent over her, and pressing his lips firmly upon those of the pale girl, he breathed into her mouth a full, strong breath; instantly her lungs filled, and a tremor ran through her whole frame. Malmiztic felt the thrill, and hope sprang up in his heart. Again he breathed upon her lips, and, like one startled from a dream, she breathed!—quick and heavily. Respiration now came free, but a heart-sickness came over her—new death-throes—but yet she breathed, and her black eyes opened in her pallid face, and Malmiztic lifted her up in his arms.

By this time, Alvarado, who had regained his strength from the stunning blow, arose from the edge of the water, and mounted the causeway, when a party of Aztecs set suddenly upon him. He was weakened greatly, and although he struggled manfully, the numbers were crushing him. Feeling the contest hopeless, he cried for his companions—but they answered not—no voices came, save far away in the distance the hum of contest mingled with the cries and counter cries of the contending hosts. Alvarado fled, shouting piteously and imploringly, pursued by a party of Aztecs, who howled at his heels like famished wolves.

At length he came to a canal, whose sluggish, deep stream presented an impassable barrier; he now turned and faced the foe, in the last hopeless state of desperation. His wild cries even reached the ears of Cortes, far ahead upon the causeway.

“Hark!” said the general, “what voice is that? By heaven, 'tis Alvarado. Holy Virgin, he must be saved!”

"It is death, certain death to turn back," replied an officer to Cortes.

"What! must he perish?" cried Cortes, vehemently.

"No power can save him," returned the knight.

"By the blood of Christ and the Cross, he shall not die alone," exclaimed the brave general. "Is there no Spaniard here to follow me to rescue him? Hark! he cries again! In the name of Santiago, is there a man of Castile who can hear that cry, and still refuse him aid? I will go, if I go alone!"

With these words, Cortes turned the head of his horse towards the city, and, striking his spurs into him, galloped back on the causeway. A dozen brave knights, on horseback, in an instant came clattering on behind him.

Malmiztic beheld them coming, and lay quietly on the earth, as if dead, with his fair ward. The cavaliers charged on until they came to the canal. Cortes hesitated not, but plunged in, and instantly his horse foundered in the mud. Every exertion of the knights was necessary to pluck him from his perilous position.

At this moment, they could discover, through the gloom, on the other side of the broad canal, the form of Alvarado, flying towards them, hotly pursued by a fierce party of Mexicans, who sent at him a shower of arrows, which made Cortes and his knights turn away—when a voice cried with the most heart-rending tones:

"For Christ's sake, leave me not; I am Alvarado!"

"Plunge into the canal," cried one of the knights.

"Nay," shouted Cortes, "try it not; thine armor will sink thee!"

"God help me!" he cried, throwing his heavy broadsword away, and stooping to the earth, he picked up from the causeway a long-handled, copper-headed lance, and wheeling it around his head, with both hands, he drove back the enemy, when, with the full velocity of his extraordinary agile frame, he flew to the brink of the canal, and planting his spear in the deep, black mud at the bottom, he strung his sinews for one tremendous bound, and his active form went flying through the air, over the lance, like a night-bird sailing through the gloom. It was a fearful spring,

but he bounded away through the air, over the canal, heaped with its dead, and alighted in the quagmire on the other side, but fell backwards in the black and muddy stream, and was sinking in the Stygian waters, when Cortes rushed to the shore, and reached him the handle of a pike; Alvarado clasped it with a death-gripe, and the Spanish general drew him safe ashore. A shout of exultation involuntarily burst from the band of brave knights at the delivery of their chivalrous companion, and turning again towards Tlacopan, they hastened to join the few scattered troops under Sandoval, which survived and constituted the main army. In vain the knights prayed Cortes to take one of their horses, but he resolutely refused, and marched hastily along on foot, by the side of Alvarado. Suddenly, as they were progressing rapidly, Alvarado exclaimed:

“By Santiago and the Virgin! behold the princess and that dark idolater!”

“By my conscience, it is true,” exclaimed Cortes, in return, as he boldly advanced to seize them, followed by the remaining cavaliers, who drew their swords and struck at the Toltec, who was half supporting the form of the princess. Instantly he released her, and swept his brilliant sword around so rapidly, and caught the coming blades so quick, that a ring of fire played about his head, from the surrounding sparks which flew from the flashing steel.

“Hosts of heaven! surely this is the demon!” cried Cortes, as he beheld the force and skill with which Malmiztic defended himself, upon the brink of the causeway, thereby keeping his foes all before him. The ringing of Malmiztic’s mysterious weapon sounded like the clash of fifty swords, more than like one, and attracted a party of Aztecs from the lake, who leaped ashore, and rushed to the rescue of the Toltec.

Cortes fell back petrified, as he beheld, by the crimson glare of the fading fire, the snow-white head and ebon eyes of Cacama. It was an appalling spectre, which chilled his blood to behold; the pallid face and ghastly glare of the Tezcucan’s gaze unnerved him. The figure seemed more an apparition from a sepulchre, than a real and living being.

Instantly, the Aztecs attacked the Christians, and Cacama,

seeing Cortes stoop to seize the princess, fell fiercely upon him with a maquahuítl. Cortes struck it in twain with a blow, and Cacama immediately drew a sword of itzli, but the Toledo-tempered blade of the Spaniard shivered it like a piece of porcelain. With this, the fiery Tezcucan rushed back to snatch a weapon from the dead, who strewed the earth around the spot, and Cortes again made a grasp for the princess. Two cavaliers were hand to hand with Malmiztic, and the general, watching the opportunity, seized Tecalco cautiously behind the back of the Toltec, and escaped with her to the other side of the causeway, where he was once more confronted by Cacama, with a maquahuítl in hand, which the Tezcucan had found.

"Fly with the girl," said Cortes, hastily, to Alvarado. "Mount the nearest horse and away!"

To follow his directions was the work of but a few seconds; but in that short space Tecalco beheld Cacama rush furiously upon Cortes with his maquahuítl, and in an instant the ferocious Castilian hewed down the weapon with his sword, and immediately the Tezcucan ran up and clenched him by the throat and almost strangled the Christian before he could make use of his sword. At length, Cortes, by a convulsive struggle, escaped from his grasp, by drawing a dagger at the same time with his left hand, and burying it in the side of Cacama, while with his right, he gave a desperate sword-thrust which pierced the heart of the ghastly prince, who gave one shriek of agony and perished at the foot of the Spanish commander.

By this time, a host of Aztecs, that covered the causeway, had come to the assistance of the Toltec, who had laid several of the knights on the wet earth, as he stood at bay. Seeing the folly of opposing such numbers, the horsemen wheeled suddenly around, and Cortes and Alvarado, catching the steeds of their dead companions, mounted them and galloped off likewise, the brave and daring commander bearing with him the half-lifeless form of Tecalco.

They were clattering over the stones far up the causeway, before the Toltec's bewildered mind first caught the thought that the princess was gone, when looking around for her, by the first pale streaks of light and the dying gleams of the fire, the

dreadful idea came upon him that she was murdered. He ran frantically to the brink of the canal, and there lay upon the miry shore the same sash and scarf which she was accustomed to wear. He plunged into the stream, but no sign could he find of her; he dived in the bloody waters, but came up hopeless. He next ran on to overtake the troop of horse which had just fled, but his chase was vain—they were out of sight, and only could be heard through the cold grey mists of the first hour of the dawn, shouting to their companions ahead with Sandoval, who returned their shouts with cheers and cries of, “God speed thee, Cortes! Santa Maria and Santiago, save thee!”

When Cortes and his comrades came up with Sandoval, he shrank aghast with dismay to behold what a mere remnant was left of all his host. His heart sickened at the sight of the handful which remained, wounded and wearied, a fearful wreck of his gallant band, while the enemy, drawing gradually off, as the first gleams of day were breaking, sent up yells and howls of the wildest exultation, and lingered on the skirts of the little train of Christians, with their myriads, in all the triumphant glory of victory. As the streaks of light brightened, thousands of boats, like night-birds fleeing from the day, skimmed over the misty surface of the lake, and bore to the city many a Christian captive and hundreds of Tlascalans.

By dull degrees the enemy drew off entirely, and the Christians, with their allies, reached the main land, at Popotla. Cortes at once, before it was light, called a review, and, to the unspeakable horror of them all, four hundred and fifty of his brave Spaniards answered not to their names, and four thousand of their true and noble-souled auxiliaries, slept the sleep of death along that fatal causeway, or lay buried in the bosom of the lake, or sadder still, were borne away to captivity and sacrifice, in the hands of their heartless enemy, and to the dungeons of the temple of their bloody war-god. Beside the bodies which strewed the deadly pathway, six and forty of their horses lay dead upon the causeway, or strangled in the thick mud of the canal. The great treasure with which they had started, was scattered and lost, and more important than all, their artillery was irrecoverably gone, except a few light pieces of ordnance. Nearly all were wounded,

and never did the dawn break upon a host more haggard and dispirited. Every eye was downcast and dim; every heart was hopeless. Wretchedness would here have wept to behold her own image, in the once proud-souled, high-hearted Hernáudo Cortes. Never looked mortal being more woe-begone; his face was blank and pallid; his eye was dead in its socket, as he glanced up at the breaking beams of day, as they came grey and glimmering out of the pale, silver east. He bent his gaze upon the wretched wreck of his followers, and hope, which had been mountain-high in his heart, and lighted with ambition, now sank to a lake of liquid lava, burning in his bosom. Once more he gazed upon them, and burying his face in his hands, he sank upon a cold stone, at the dead hour of the dawn, and bursting into a flood of tears, wept in the unchecked bitterness of his heart. It was a piteous spectacle to behold the man whose unflinching energy and daring spirit had risen triumphant over the countless obstacles which intercepted his path, and in the vaulting ambition of his soul, risen above the low mists which dampen the ardor of meaner spirits, and like an upsoaring condor, sunned his shining pinions in the golden beams of glory; towering through the mountain-clouds of heaven, and baring his breast to the thunder-bolt, and the storm-spirit's rushing breath;—now struck, as if by the lightning-lance of God, midway in his upward career, hurled back to the earth, blackened and blasted, like Satan and his angels, dropping and falling back from the empyrean. Here were the palaces of his ambition, whose pinnacles, at nightfall, pierced the canopy of the clouds, and shot aloft into the clear, blue heights of heaven; now, in the sombre shadows of the morning mist, a fallen mass of ruins, over which desolation, like an earthquake spirit, stalked, and gazed upon the wreck which a single night had made. Hitherto his daring and genius had but to conceive a thought, and Fortune, with her magic wand, would work it out successfully. He had laughed in the face of hardship, borne suffering and disappointment with tranquillity. Risen from every reverse, like Anteus from the earth; redoubled in his might, and ready again to look danger in the eye, and pluck the laurel of victory from the skeleton hand of death. Led ever on by Hope, who stretched her unending canvass of the time to

come, and clothed it in all the gorgeous coloring of her rainbow pencil. A glorious angel, Hope—clad in the habiliments of Heaven, and with extended arm ever pointing to the gorgeous vista just bursting into view, and growing brighter with every step of his advancement, disclosing new realms, and opening fresh fields for his conquest and occupancy.

Hernando Cortes sat upon the cold rock, in the grey glimpses of the morning; his own history rose in his mind, and passed like a phantasmal panorama from the hour when with his little fleet, he cut the cables and stood out by night, in search of the unknown empires of the west, to the time when he had planted his triumphant banner of the Cross and Castile on the pinnacle of the temple of Mexitli, and was master of the mightiest monarch that ever swayed the rod of empire in the land of the setting sun. Tracing his own course and his handful of chivalrous associates, until by unequalled prowess, he had conquered countless hosts, and leagued them to himself and to his cause. How they had started forth, a few poor soldiers of fortune—adventurers, whose chief means consisted of a suit of mail, or a stout-limbed steed, with scarce ducats enough to have bought a peasant's hut on the slopes of the Sierra Morena, or a fisherman's shed on the silver shores of the Guadalquivir, by a sudden freak of fortune, and their own indefatigable fortitude and enterprise, suddenly changed to the possessors of riches, which would have purchased the palaces of a Venetian duke, or the Doge himself; but now as fleeting as an Aurora Borealis, whose shadowy splendors glow over the icebergs of the pole; behold it all depart, and a black night close with its gloomy darkness over the brilliant and beautiful vision of empire and power, which had just burst upon them in its transcendent glory. Cortes felt that his adventures had been as one who, seeking for the lost Atlantis, emerges suddenly upon the golden glories of El Dorado, and finds himself in reality like Sinbad of the oriental romance, in the midst of the valley of diamonds. Thus far his star of fate was shorn not of a beam; he had burst in upon a silent land with his few cavaliers, terrible as a sudden comet with its fiery train; he had bid defiance to Velasquez in Cuba, and to the threatened thunders of the Bishop of Burgos, in Spain. He had crushed a hydra-headed mutiny

among his own men, and made a bonfire of all their means of escape. He had captured the captain, who had been sent to take him into captivity. He had run over a continent, and conquered a realm which would shame the achievements of Cæsar. He had wrought, in a few months, with a handful of knights, a work, to rival Alexander with his hosts, and headed a party more chivalric and invincible than the proudest paladins that ever Godfrey or Richard led through Palestine, to thunder at the gates of the Holy City of the Sepulchre. He had borne the blazing banner of the Cross into the very chaos of heathenism. He had borne the shining order of his patron saint over the waste of waters, and carried it, glittering on his breast, into the vast wilderness of the west, when not a cross pointed to heaven between the white-sheeted ice-mountains of Bhering, in the north, and the glass-green towers of ice which sink a thousand fathoms in Magellan's roaring straits, and flash back the foam when the night-storm hurtles over the dark and frozen peaks of Patagonia. Not a spire shot its shining shaft up to the western sun. Not a bell tolled its deep and solemn chime to call mortals to their Maker's altar; but in the lone, green recesses of the luxuriant forest, sightless idols reared their gigantic figures aloft, side by side with the monster oaks, and gazed glaringly and vacantly with their stony eyes upon the flower-mantled earth, and heathen altars buried in the almost impenetrable bosom of the dark, dense wilderness, blushed in the leafy shade with the red stains of human sacrifice. And he, Hernando Cortes, had been the pioneer to plant in those sequestered spots, the emblem of our Saviour's suffering, and first to make the untaught echoes of those woods, answer to the hymn of praise, sent up to Him who liveth forever and ever! and to him had been given the keys of the Island Queen, the metropolis of the western world, the sovereignty of the city, whose sway was confined only by the two mighty oceans of earth, whose boundaries were belted by the lands of perpetual snow upon the north, and those mysterious, idol-haunted wildernesses and groves of Guatemala, dark with their green and polished leaves, and bloom-bearing, creeping vines. But now, as he cast his glance around him, behold what a scene! All his proud works, like pictures and figures drawn upon a sandy beach at even-tide, the

rolling wave of a single night had swept away in darkness, and day dawned upon the magic map, filled up and blotted out from existence. The charmed ink with which his fortune had been written in letters of gold at sunset, faded like the gift of a fairy before the morrow, and the scroll of his destiny illuminated and emblazoned with brilliant achievements, was now a blank, and the shining volume which recorded his triumphs, was a black book, dyed by the dark and bloody waters of Tezcuco, whose indelible stain no alchemy could extract.

Cortes sat upon the cold stone at the dead time of the dawn, and silently surveyed the wreck and ruin before him; the dead strewn the earth; his late proud host, now dwindled to a scanty band, stood around him like haggard spectres haunting the spot, and gazing to see the ghosts of their companions; they wept not; theirs was a silent woe—too deep for tears—a shock which froze the heart's spring, rather than forcing its waters to overflow the eye. But Cortes was unmanned, overthrown, shipwrecked at heart, wholly dispirited, and dejected; his energy was crushed to a child's weakness, and the conqueror of kings gazed upon his own wounded frame, and then upon his rusted, blood-clotted sword, which lay bare before him, having done all that it could for the fallen fortunes of its master—he who had stood up sternly and borne the brunt of battle—he, the high, proud, bold, chivalric Cortes, drooped his head, and clasping his hands together, burst into a flood of irresistible tears. It was a strange and touching picture, to see pride so weighed down by sorrow, to see the flowers of hope crushed under the feet of disappointment, and the proud, climbing vine of ambition, towering heavenward, blighted in a night, and all the leaves and blossoms of its promise blasted and withered upon the stem. It was a sad sight to see a man weep, and such a man, a stern, hardy, iron-armed soldier—a bold, daring, fierce cavalier—a bearded warrior, with a fiery gaze, now turned to a sorrowing and heart-stricken boy, with sad, dim eyes, dropping tears like a cold icicle in the warm glances of the ruddy morning sun;—and as the highest soaring hope must ever have the greatest fall, so did the gorgeous dreams of wealth and dominion, in fading away, leave a cold and bleak reality. How sad then the band who had looked to the

eye of that leader for their light and hope, when the fire which he infused by a glance, had gone out, and that clear, clarion voice had sunken into hopeless sadness and despondency! How changed was this from the front and port of him, who but a few months before had entered the capital amid the firing of cannon and the acclamations of the multitude; who rode his proud war-horse with such martial magnificence, while his well-appointed knights, with military equipment and order worthy of the most courtly lists of Christendom, followed, glittering in their burnished harness of steel—now a defeated general with a wretched fragment of an army, expelled from the fairest city of the broad west, an outcast and wanderer at the caprice of the merest chance, and the vilest foe, leading back the few and wounded allies yet living to tell their mournful tale, in the proud city of Tlascalala, and to make the wife turn pale to hear that her lord perished on the dread causeway, and the old man to tremble as he heard how his son was borne away in the canoes of the foe-men, over the black waters of the lake, to dungeons which opened not upon day, save for sacrifice.

And this was the morrow of *Noche Triste*!—The Mournful Night!—a period which will be a spot of terror in the world's history, as long as a green water-flag shall wave by the margin of the blue Tezcuco, where the fisherman, to this day, looks down through the clear depths for the golden bars cast away by the fugitives, or pulls up, with his boat-hook, from the muddy bottom, the brazen casque of some Christian cavalier.

CHAPTER XXV.

CORTES and his scattered band pursued their way on to Pototla; from thence they again marched on through the valley of the lakes, gradually making their course through the rising table lands towards Tlascala. The march was a very loose one, little care being taken for discipline; here and there could be seen a band of knights with their stained and rusted armor, amid a party of half clad Indians, wending their way across the green fields, or couples would be loitering behind recounting to each other their narrow chances of escape from the terrors of Noche Triste, or telling of desperate defences and the loss of countless wealth, the treasure with which he had hoped to have purchased some sweet, vine-covered cot in Andalusia.

Among the parties who thus lingered in the distance, from the main body of the troops, was a handsome knight, mounted upon a spirited, glossy-black mare, and by his side a female was riding on a palfrey, a mode of travel to which she was evidently unaccustomed, from her timid manner of managing the animal.

"Beautiful Tecalco!" said the knight, who was Alvarado, "grieve not thus; these tears, which gem those eyes, must be chased away; true, thou hast lost thy friends, but thou shalt find shelter with hearts which will love thee more than ever thou hast been loved, and thou shalt be far happier than in the midst of these heathens and their abominations."

The maiden replied in her native tongue, in which language Alvarado had addressed her:

"It lies not in the power of man to blot from my memory the recollection of home and friends—my heart will pine when severed from them."

"Lady," answered the other, "if thou wilt go with me, I will

bear thee to a land of beauty, to the home of my heart, in Spain !”

“But that home,” replied Tecalco, “will be far from the home of *my* heart. How shall I live when every face is a stranger to me ? In thy unknown land my spirit would silently decline, and not a soul would bear me sympathy.”

“Beautiful lady !” exclaimed the Spaniard, “you wrong me deeply, I will love thee, love thee fondly and forever ; I will share with thee a palace, where the bright-green forests of the Morena flourish, and the vine-dotted valleys stretch out at our feet in unending scenes of beauty ; silver rivers, flowing through emerald meads, and winding amid dark olive groves, shall cheer thy sight ; the honey breath of a million crimson-lipped and gold-eyed flowers shall waft their incense to thee ; and hard by, groves, blushing with blossoms and clustering with yellow and scarlet fruits, shall shelter ever-playing fountains ; and amid the leaves the matchless nightingale, with its music-loving soul, shall wake such melodies that thou shalt deem it the bird which sings in thy fabled paradise.”

“Nay,” replied the maiden, “couldst thou bear me to a land whose beauty outshines all the earth’s loveliness, it would not delight me, were those whom I love not there. Heaven would be naked and void, could we not meet therein the souls of those whom we love.”

“Ah !” said Alvarado, with surprise, “thou hast faith in immortality ! then will I love thee more than ever. I might have known that the lovely soul which sits in those deep and beautiful eyes claimed kindred with holier spheres ;—but whence, maiden, comes thy belief in happiness hereafter ?”

“From one,” answered Tecalco, “whose eye reads the stars of heaven, and who holds silent converse and communion with the speechless palms upon the mountain, and the wild fairy spirits whose delicate fingers open the leaves of the night-flowers ; one who talks with the dread, mysterious presences, which no mortal eye can see—who whispers to the winds, and they answer him—and whose heart holds the full sympathy with humanity in every throb.”

"Whom meanest thou?" questioned the cavalier.

"Hast thou not heard," replied Tecalco, "of Malmiztic, the Revered, the philosopher, the believer in the one invisible God?"

"Ay," answered Alvarado, as the thought suddenly flashed over him, "didst thou love him?"

"Love him!" returned the Aztec maid, "does the bee love the blossom, the wild deer the shady glen, the swallow the balmy breeze and the blue billow? Love him!—there is a spring of love and sunshine in my heart, where his image ever plays upon its depths; night and day he is reflected there, as stars seen from a deep well, are ever set in heaven the same, be there sun or moon above—so, by day and darkness, grief and gladness, weal or woe, does the thought of him live within me, and all of earth may pass away, my body perish like a broken cactus, but my soul will seek him in spheres beyond the realms over which death stretches, his dark wings—and I will follow him through sphere after sphere, in his flight to eternity, as the shadow upon the wave follows the snowy sea-bird over the world of waters."

"I am sorry thou didst love him thus," said Alvarado, drooping his head, as if in grief.

"Why dost thou sorrow?" questioned the maid.

"Because," replied the Cavalier, "thou art a captive to Cortes."

"Heaven help me!" exclaimed Tecalco, "then I am lost. Has he no heart? will he not heed my prayers?"

Alvarado replied, "Thou little knowest him, lady; his bosom melts not at the tear of the sorrowful, or the voice of the complaining. He would tell thee he loves thee, but he loves thee not; but I, gentle lady, feel more for thee than expression can tell. In my own home I have seen those who were beautiful, but they blessed not my vision as thou dost, for I have never loved until I beheld those orbs of thine, where loveliness sits in the midst of shadows, and gazes forth upon the world like an angel of light."

"Then if thou lovest me," said Tecalco, "save me from Cortes."

"Nay, beautiful damsel," answered the knight, "he will not yield thee unless thou art bound to me by sacred ties; the bonds

of the heart, and the law of love, he will not heed. Then must thy choice be made to share with Alvarado his home and heart, in lawful union of our church, or be the leman of one who cannot love thee. Then art thou willing to be mine?"

"Thine!" exclaimed Tecalco, half astonished and half musing.

"Ay, mine!" repeated Alvarado.

"This may not be," returned the princess, "I am pledged to another; I am bound by heart and word to Malmiztic."

"Then do I sorrow for thee more than ever," said the politic Spaniard.

"Why so?" inquired Tecalco.

"I fear," answered Alvarado, "you are too weak to hear why."

"Hath any ill befallen him?" gasped the maiden, as she laid her hand upon the arm of Alvarado, regardless of the reins of her beast, which she had dropped.

"Alas!" said the dissembling Spaniard, "I must get some other person to tell this sad story to you."

"Nay, speak on," said Tecalco, "I will hear it, and bear all with fortitude."

"Indeed, I cannot so wound thee, knowing how thou hast loved him," returned Alvarado.

"I see it," exclaimed the princess, "he is captured—thou hast made him a prisoner. Let me but see him, and I ask no more."

"Sweet lady," replied the other, "would I could do so, but thou shalt hear his fate, if thou wilt be calm."

"I will," briefly returned the princess.

"Then know you," said Alvarado, "that when Cortes turned back for the last time upon the fatal causeway, he saw the figure of a broad-framed, powerful man, and dashing up to him upon his steed, he beheld the dark-eyed Toltec. The giant was weaponless and alone, and with one stroke of his heavy falchion, Cortes cut him down, and the mighty Malmiztic fell upon the causeway a corse!"

At these words, Alvarado beheld the face of the princess overspread with pallor, and with a vacant expression in her eyes, she sank in her saddle lifeless. The knight instantly supported her, and in a few moments Cortes, with a handful of cavaliers,

galloped up to the spot. When the commander inquired the cause of this sudden faintness; Alvarado explained it as the effect of anxiety and exhaustion.

Cortes ordered a litter to be brought, to which Tecalco was transferred, and the army continued their march, wearily and sad, along the beautiful plains which lay on the route to Tlascala.

* * * * *

On the morrow of Noche Triste, the Aztecs were busily employed in burying their dead, and the priests were occupied in conveying the prisoners who had been captured, to the cells and dungeons beneath the great tower.

Scarce were the fallen Aztecs entombed, when the high priest began to sacrifice the unfortunate Tlascalans, who had fallen into his hands, and the Aztecs seemed to forget for a time the loss of their friends, in this wild triumph over their foes; and hour after hour, as the sacrifice progressed, the unfortunate captives could hear the cries of their companions, as one after another was brought to the altar-stone, where the high priest, in his scarlet robes and his black clad assistants, offered them up amid pæans of triumph, to the honor of Mexitli. In vain Cuiclahua and Guatemozin remonstrated against this dreadful slaughter, but the whole mass of the priesthood came out by thousands, and insisted upon the continuance of the offering, in addition to which the populace poured forth, and loudly advocated the policy of the priests. The father begged for vengeance for his child, the wife for her lord, the sister for her brother. Loud and clamorous were the cries for retribution upon the enemy—blood called for blood.

Thus day after day passed away with the same sanguinary scenes repeated. During this period, Malmiztic had wandered off to the ruins of Tezcozinco, and secluded himself in his splendid but solitary palace, hard by, upon the same hill, or whiling away the hours gloomily in the subterranean recesses of his hidden cavern. Wherever he wandered, his faithful dwarf followed him in sympathetic silence. Once he had attempted to soothe the unspeakable grief of the Toltec, by playing his lute-like instrument, but the heart of Malmiztic was too full to bear the gentle melody, whose soft notes recalled the memory of his lost Tecalco.

For many days he had gone to the bank of the causeway, and sought for the spot where he supposed she had gone down in the dark waters to never rise again. Still would he gaze for hours upon the light scarf which she had constantly worn, and ever and anon, as some trifle which she had admired, or touched, would present itself to his view, it would be linked in his mind with her lovely countenance; and as he strolled moodily and heavy of heart among the moss-covered wrecks of the ancient palaces upon the hill, his busy fancy could hear her voice whispering softly in his ear, and he would start up as if the figure were full before his eyes, and so vividly would imagination depict her form, that Malmiztic would be ready to speak to the creature of his mind, when suddenly the apparition would depart, and the silent tears would start from the eyes of the lone and desolate mourner.

Day and night he drooped—in the hours of sunshine he strayed through the leafy darkness of the thick forest, and by the moon's pale light he would sit, upon some old and broken fragment of the ruined temples hard by, and gaze upon the midnight moon, or watch the long white-winged clouds skimming through the vault above, and fancying they were angels bearing off to another sphere the beautiful being whose loss had left his soul's realm voiceless and vacant.

In vain Malmiztic unfolded the mighty volumes which were stored in the library of his superb palace, but a blar was upon the illuminated pages wherever his eye fell, and as a blistering tear would drop and stain the leaf, the Toltec would turn away and wander through the large and lonely apartments of the edifice, gazing upon the magnificent historical paintings which decorated the walls, and told the tales of ages fled forever. But all the splendor of his dwelling-places, could not chase the shadow of gloom from his brow.

At length he sought his cavern, with the dwarf to accompany him, and closing himself from the world, sought seclusion in prayer for days together, in the subterranean citadel whose black marble altar stone bore the mysterious words in Toltec characters, in gold, "The Temple of the Invisible God—the Cause of Causes."

CHAPTER XXVI.

O T O M B A .

"Oh! what it was to see this tremendous battle! how we closed foot to foot! and with what fury the dogs fought us!"—BERNAL DIAZ.

DAY after day, Cortes continued his march on towards Tlascalala, and all along the route he was harassed by small squads of the enemy, who would sally forth, and after assailing his worn soldiers and dispirited confederates, would disappear to renew the skirmish on the morrow.

At length, as they were proceeding on one morning, while it was comparatively cool, under the friendly shelter of scattered groves, and dragging themselves forward, rather than marching (for a general exhaustion and languor had overcome them, from the constant annoyance of handsful of the enemy), they descried, to their utter amazement, on the distant plains of Otomba, full before them, an immense army stretched out and advancing upon them. They were overwhelmed and ready to sink in the earth at the fearful spectacle.

The day was bright and beautiful; the gently-undulating plain which stretched out to the limit of sight, was a rich, green sea of velvet grass, with islands of flowers, whose rainbow tints gleamed in the golden sunshine. Along the horizon, like the up-rising of a line of clouds came the dark myriads of Mexico and their allies, commanded by the highest noble of the neighboring province, whose name was Chihuaca. The whole mass of warriors, for leagues upon leagues, and province upon province, had been collected, and were now hastening on to annihilate the weakened Spaniards and their languid allies.

The threatening multitude still approached, apparently rising from the earth, like locusts, and as far as the eye of Cortes could

stretch, he beheld along the plain the black lines becoming visible, swelling in volume with every movement.

Right and left they came; thickening as they advanced; like the outpouring of a vast hive of bees, their hum could be faintly heard in the distance, but as they neared the cavaliers and their companions, their angry roar became more distinct, and the fierce sound of the wild war instruments was borne up to their ears by the breath of the soft breeze; loud and more loud, the dreadful noises came, and nearer sounded the chaotic hum of voices, as the dark masses rolled up into view over the swelling plain; the bright sun flashed upon a thousand ensigns and banners, whose purple, gold, and burnished faces changed, with every movement, to azure, crimson, and green. Pennons and feathers fluttered in the breeze, and the glittering heads of copper-tipped lances and spears bristled thick as the barbs in a golden field of grain.

Cortes gazed upon this splendid but terrible pageant, and then turned to behold his own troops and allies. Misery and hunger had thinned their faces, and dimmed their eyes; many were pale from wounds, and the whole band appeared to be in a sick and starving condition, and almost ready to lie down and die, for their scanty provision was well nigh exhausted.

Cortes commanded the wounded to be taken off the horses upon which they had been borne, and placed on crutches, and mounting a green, grass-covered knoll, he surveyed the haggard band again; but with a calm, clear countenance, wherein deathless determination sat in settled majesty, he addressed the multitude, with thrilling power, and pointed to the coming host who darkened the plain. He depicted the utter hopelessness of escape—the terrors of torture succeeding surrender. He called upon them to make this last effort for the sake of the republic of Tlascala, and the honor of old Spain;—for the sake of victory, or a death on the green plains of Otomba. He spoke with great animation, and the effect upon the troops was wonderful, as he exclaimed at the conclusion of the address:

“We must conquer, or die! He who has shielded us before will save us now! Santiago! Santiago! and God be with us!” and with these words, the stiff and wounded veterans grasped firmly their spears, and the bowmen twanged their strings, while

the brown, weather-worn faces caught a sad but resolute gleam of animation, and the hard-handed cavalry-unhung their battle-axes from their saddle-bows, and wheeling round their rusted blades, brown in the sun, they echoed the old cry of Castile, "Santiago! Santiago! and God be with us!" and away they dashed against the countless coming hosts, while behind them, the wearied and almost naked Tlascalans caught a new life and spirit from their leaders, who clashed with the advance guard of the mighty Aztec host, and scattered them with a terrific shock.

The battle was general almost instantly, in every part of the green, sunny plain; strife and contention were rife, and the many-colored standards were mingled in strange confusion, while the uproar of cries, where every province gave its war-cry, filled the welkin with the wildest sounds.

Famished and exhausted as the Tlascalans were, they yet rushed to the conflict with an unfaltering courage, and the pale faces of the overwrought Christians could be seen, here and there upon the field of fight, battling like a band of spectres, and painting the green grass with blood.

On they dashed amid the brown swarms of the foe, and hurried them away as the autumnal gust whirls the red leaves of the forest; but again the enemy would eddy back in a triple volume, and press furiously upon the Christian lines, and overthrow the faithful Tlascalans who followed them.

The combat was hand to hand, and although the corpses of hundreds of Aztecs blackened the earth, nothing seemed missing from the multitude. Cortes would break through the lines, and instantly the gap would close up again. At length, seeing the impossibility of making an impression upon the Mexican myriads, Cortes galloped back and brought the artillery into action, clearing the crowd before him until he came full in front of the legions of the enemy. Here his few field-pieces, though small, playing upon the dense mass of Mexicans, swept down countless numbers, and threw the main body into the wildest disorder. Right on went the cannon, and the enemy fled before it, while the Tlascalan allies stoutly engaged the Aztecs in every quarter of the field, but often fell back from the crushing power of the multitudinous enemy, who would suddenly wheel in their retreat and encounter

the Christians and their confederates with a terrible fierceness, often forcing them to recoil from the violence of the shock and seek shelter in the rear of the great guns, whose red blaze flashed in the yellow sunlight, and whose curling clouds of smoke rolled up towards the blue heavens.

Now the myriads of Mexicans came charging madly on, and their impetuosity knew no restraint ; confident from numbers, and maddened by memory of former defeats, they rushed desperately on, and all the combined power of the Christians and their allies, scattered as they were in all parts of the field, was wholly unable to arrest them. The wild rage of the Aztecs carried the Tlascalans before them like a mountain torrent ; the crowd was countless and their fierceness terrible ; they rushed upon the weak and famished Tlascalans, in spite of the sturdy efforts of the cavaliers to protect them, and even in defiance of the cannon, which wrought among their ranks tremendous slaughter.

In vain the captains of the Christian bands would rally the allies ; an overpowering host would burst upon them with spears, maquahuitls, arrows, darts, and slings, and crowding on thick over the plain, came fresh foes with every moment, yelling like furies, and brandishing their weapons in the golden sunlight. Still the power and number of the Aztecs was irresistible, and in every quarter of the battle confusion seized upon the valiant but disordered Tlascalans, while the infuriate enemy, hot upon their heels, made fell work with the weak and weary host. Yells of triumph rose from the Aztec host and rang upon the air ; the hoarse sound of the conch shells, and the wild voices of their leaders, were death notes to the poor Tlascalans, as the foe came rushing on like a roaring tide, sweeping everything before its dark wave. An entangled forest of spears and banners moved everywhere thick in the battle, and far to the right, amid a crowd of splendidly-attired nobility, upon an elevated point of the plain, the commanding chief Chihuaca, was stationed in a gorgeous litter, hung with cloth of gold, and borne upon the shoulders of his officers. This brilliant equipage, which glittered with rainbow colors, from feather work and gems, caught the eye of Cortes, who instantly determined that the leader of the battle occupied the gaudy litter.

“Now, Sandoval,” said Cortes, rising in his stirrups, “the

holy Virgin must be with us; or our hopes and lives are lost upon this field; we are routed, scattered and defeated in every point, and our allies are cut to pieces. Follow me, for this stroke must fix our fate. Santiago, be with us!"

And with these words the dauntless Cortes darted across the field on his powerful steed, with his lance in the rest, and his sword in his hand, cutting right and left, as he flew far over the plain, followed by Sandoval, who could scarce keep pace with the fiery courser of Cortes. Away they sped, cleaving their course through the throng, far over the green hillocks, towards the eminence from which Chihuaca was cheering on his victorious troops who were in pursuit of the flying Tlascalans. Cortes, still leaving Sandoval farther behind, dashed forward at a terrific speed, and, like the descending sweep of a hungry condor, he burst amid the band of noble guards around Chihuaca, and in an instant their lances and javelins covered Cortes like a cloud, but the Spaniard was proof to their arms, for his well-formed figure was clad in stout armor of steel, from which the weapons glanced ineffectually aside. But Cortes spurred madly on towards the litter, and upon either hand he struck down all who attempted to stay his course; plunging headlong into the midst of the foe, he raised his lance to a level, and with an impetuous rush he drove his gleaming steel point full into the body of the unfortunate Chihuaca, as he sat in his gorgeous palanquin, and the force of the stroke hurled the chieftain out upon the earth, a bleeding and lifeless form, while Cortes wheeled his steed about swiftly, and began cutting his way back through the throng who were about to overwhelm Sandoval, when the sight of their chieftain dashed to the earth filled them with consternation, and they fled, leaving an opening for the cavaliers to regain the company of their companions, who came on sweeping the whole army of foes before them with frightful havoc. The panic was wonderful; rank rushed confused upon rank, and one fugitive stumbled over another, while the Tlascalans, aroused to a new sense of vengeance, virtually mowed them down, and cut them to pieces as they fled, while Cortes, with his artillery, came up, and opening a fiery sheet of death upon the crowded mass, strewed the whole earth with wrecks of human life; and still the fierce thunder-guns

poured forth their murderous and destructive lightnings amid the black smoke whose wreaths rolled over the emerald plains of Otomba.

Far and wide fled the routed and affrighted Aztecs and their associates. For four dreadful hours had this tornado raged upon the plain, and of the two hundred thousand gorgeously-equipped warriors who came forth brilliant as the sun in the morning, twenty thousand were now so many vacant tenements of clay, from which the frightened souls had fled and left them as homes for the ogre spirit of decay.

The day was won—but oh! what a fearful victory! amid the ghastly hosts which strewed the plain, and made its emerald face blush, were nearly half the faithful Tlascalans, who had followed the course of the conqueror from his entry into the city of Tlascala, and the few who were now left were all wounded, as well as their Christian companions.

Scarcely had Cortes got them prepared, after the shock of the battle, to start, when the chief lords and people of Tlascala came down to them, and condoled with their fellow-countrymen upon their misfortunes, affording the exhausted army much assistance and relief, and comforting them as much as possible for the loss of their companions, and their own wounded and famished condition.

With this succor, Cortes and his remnant of an army, like a wounded snake, dragged slowly in Tlascala.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CUITLAHUA was now busily occupied in the city of Mexico, repairing the work of destruction which Cortes had wrought upon the splendid metropolis. Throughout the place vast numbers of workmen were employed upon fortifications, fortresses, intrenchments, fosses, walls, ditches, and all preparation necessary to withstand a siege. In addition to this, the wise and efficient king dispatched orders throughout the empire, proclaiming an acquittance of tribute to all persons in the realm who should prosecute war upon the Christians.

Scarce three or four months had passed since Cuitlahua had mounted the throne of the Aztec empire, with his beautiful bride Tecuiclipa; but in that time his resolute and masterly mind had wrought a great change in the affairs of government, and the people were once more beginning to rouse to a sense of their own power and importance.

One morning, while the sun had just kissed the distant peaks of Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl, the high priest stood upon the top of the temple ready to sacrifice a sick Spanish prisoner. Close at hand stood Malmiztic and Guatemozin, remonstrating against the act; the latter exclaimed, in a fiery tone:

"It is wrong to kill this captive thus; health hath deserted the body of the creature, and it is but offering carrion to the gods."

"Hold," replied the high-priest, "this is my office; thy voice must be silent. Thou art a valiant soldier, and hast done the government much good, otherwise I should have an atonement from thee for thy sacrilege."

"Talk not to me of atonements," said Guatemozin, rapidly, as the bright flush glowed upon his beautiful and manly countenance, "I recognize no law of sacrifice, as high as the soldier's honor,

to the sick captive. I have opposed these foul rites at all times, and only acquiesced to silence the populace in their clamors; but nothing demands the life of this afflicted soldier—he hath only wronged us in following his master, and the all-wise One hath visited this punishment upon him therefor.”

“I am assured, now, that that which I have heard is true; thou hast listened to the teachings of yon dark magician, the last of the Toltec race—they whom the gods, in their just wrath, have destroyed, and left their gorgeous temples as hiding-places for the owl and blind bat. Turn swiftly away from him, or he will lead thee to the path of the dead by his deceitful doctrines.”

“Priest,” said Guatemozin, “what my faith may be matters not; it is no affair of yours; I only ask that you will forego to make a sacrifice of one already afflicted with some strange malady.”

“I will not hear thee,” replied the priest sternly; “go hence, before I set set a curse upon thee!”

“Curse, if thou likest,” said Guatemozin, “I will bear all that may befall a man who simply prays to have a common mercy shown.”

“Away,” said the priest, as he pushed aside Guatemozin with one hand, and drew his huge knife of *itzli* with the other, as he advanced towards the victim who lay naked upon the sacrificial stone.

“What! dost thou hurl me aside thus, thou red-robed demon!” said the excited prince; “lay thy hands upon my person again, and I will hang thy head by its gory locks outside of this temple’s wall!”

“Gracious sovereign,” said the priest, to Cuitlahua, who had just entered the temple, “command this mad youth, and yon dark sorcerer, who hath led him astray, to depart; nay, command the sorcerer to be made a sacrifice to atone for the sacrilege this day committed before the altar.”

“Nay,” said the king, “this difference must not exist; Guatemozin must depart, but it needs not that the wise Malmiztic should suffer death.”

“But,” cried the priest, “what shall be done? how shall a sacrifice be made?”

"Needs there an offering?" questioned Cuitlahua.

"Ay," answered the hypocritical destroyer, "or thou shalt see a blight upon the land—a deadly retribution for neglect of our gods, and hearkening to the falsehoods of strange divinities."

"Then if we must answer with life, take the prisoner," said Cuitlahua.

The fierce countenance of the priest gleamed with a fiendish smile, and with his blade of *itzli*, like the broad knife of a butcher, he advanced towards the captive. The Spaniard lifted his head slightly off the stone of sacrifice, and turning his head full upon Cuitlahua, he exclaimed :

"The blackest curse of the Christian's God wither and blast you! May fiends follow thee forever, and the angel of mercy turn from thee, Cuitlahua, when thou callest upon her!"

"Cease!" said the priest, as he seized the victim, and lifted aloft the dreadful knife.

"Idolater, beware!" said Malmiztic, to the priest; but ere the words were fully spoken, the deadly weapon pierced the Christian's heart!

"The gods are satisfied," said the priest, "and now their blessing upon thee, Cuitlahua, for thy devotion to our ancient rites."

And so saying, the arch idolater laid his bloody hands in benediction upon the head of the Aztec monarch, who departed, with Guatemozin and Malmiztic from the temple.

Upon the morrow a strange and terrible disease had fallen upon the high priest; his form became a loathsome mass of mortality, and death soon completed the scene. Scarce had the priest been buried, when the same fatal scourge which came with the priest's blessing, broke out upon the king, and Cuitlahua sickened and was soon spotted by the awful pestilence. It was the European's last curse—the dying Spaniard's anathema—the Small Pox.

In a brief space of time, the king was a corpse, and the dread disease was scourging the whole city—the agent of death, hitherto unknown upon the American continent, wrought fearfully in the midst of the metropolis for many days.

In the meantime, the obsequies of Cuitlahua had been performed, and the coronation of Guatemozin celebrated.

Malmiztic, bereft of Tecalco, now came, even in the midst of his own sorrow, and softened the sadness of the widowed Tecuiclipi, who lamented with a deep grief the loss of her brave and noble lord. And still the Toltec strayed day after day to the lake to mark the spot where he missed the sweet star who had lighted his pathway on earth. But the opening hours of time presented no glance of her lovely but lost face, and gloom, like a shadow, followed the footsteps of the Toltec.

But the fair cause of his grief was now with the Christians, in the city of Tlascala, where Cortes and his wreck of an army were hospitably and even triumphantly received by Maxicatzin, the ancient governor; but in the senate the young and fiery Xicotencatl opposed the Spaniards, insomuch that the reverend Maxicatzin became so much irritated at his harsh and bitter language, that he rose from his seat and threw the young warrior out of the senate house with violence. Quiet was then restored, and the troops rested and recruited themselves in the city, and received the kindest treatment from the citizens of Tlascala, who sympathised with their sufferings and used every exertion to ameliorate their condition.

During this period of peace, Father Olmedo prepared a great jubilee, with all the most imposing rites and ceremonies of the church, and so powerful was his preaching and the solemnities of the service, that hundreds of Tlascalans became converts, and four of the most distinguished chiefs renounced the follies of their forefathers and took up the Cross of Christ, to the infinite delight of the Spaniards, who glorified God and the Virgin for this gleam of heavenly light shot into the realm of darkness and paganism.

At this grand festival, Cortes and Alvarado, who watched each other with a jealous eye, both attempted to persuade Tecalco to embrace the holy Catholic faith, but the doctrines which the Toltec had taught her were stamped upon her heart, and she clung to them with the faith of a martyr, while Father Olmedo marveled at her constancy, and was amazed with what seemed to him the wild chimeras of an incomprehensible and startling theology of a strange ideal God, endless angel worlds, and infinite progression.

As the lightning-smitten oak sometimes sends forth new shoots from the kiss of the sunshine, so did the comforts and quietude of Tlascala warm into life new hopes in the heart of Cortes.— Day after day, for weeks, did the dream grow upon him, until the re-animated eagle eye of ambition glittered as it gazed upon the gorgeous visions of the future.

The imperishable spirit of hope pointed back to Mexico, and energy spoke aloud in the bosom of the Spaniard, “Never falter, for success is thine.” Cortes heard these words of his own spirit, and forthwith his mind bent itself upon the one thought of conquest, and he compassed the vast scheme of cutting off, one by one, the thousand tributaries which surrounded the metropolis, and lent power and means from their various provinces to withstand all assaults and sieges which might be directed against the city. But when Cortes broached this idea to his followers, a large portion of them strongly dissented, and urged that he should return to Cuba. To this many seemed willing, for they were weary of a constant warfare where nothing had been gained, and so many were afflicted and wounded. Cortes felt his inability to control this disposition to depart; he, therefore, stated his fixed determination to remain, and commanded all those who were unwilling to share his fortune, to step out of the ranks. To his surprise and mortification most of the soldiers of Narvaez, who had joined him, stepped forward, and they were followed by a few of his own veterans. Seeing their settled purpose, Cortes permitted them to depart, and at the same time dispatched with them some of his faithful friends to Hispaniola for horses, men, artillery, and arms, with which he was once again to undertake the overthrow of the occidental Venice.

These disaffected troops having departed, the general began a review of his men and allies, the Tlascalans, and kept up a strict military discipline, insomuch that upon one occasion a Moor of his party, having stolen some turkeys from the Tlascalans, was detected, tried, found guilty, and hung! This severe and summary mode of proceeding gave the Tlascalans a vivid picture of the stern discipline of the conqueror, and left an impression not easily eradicated from their minds.

But even with all the allies who could now be mustered, Cortes

felt that his force would be feeble and disproportionate to his designs; but while revolving in his mind how he should proceed, news came that Spanish troops had arrived upon the coast, and were now making their way with all dispatch to join the daring adventurer, Cortes, whose fame had reached their ears, and under whose command they were willing to scale the towers of the infidel and gather the pagan gold.

This fresh support cheered and animated many who were desponding in their solitude, and their joy was further increased when, in the course of a few days, another band came up from the coast and joined them in Tlascala, and shortly afterwards their own companions arrived from Hispaniola, bringing a fresh supply of horses, men, artillery, and arms.

In a brief space of time, Cortes, by continued reviews, had formed a well-drilled and powerful army.

In order to carry his great scheme into effect, Cortes had the construction of thirteen brigs, of different sizes, undertaken by an experienced ship-builder, named Martin Lopez, aided by three or four Spanish carpenters and a large body of the ingenious natives, who soon acquired much skill in the art; and with this assistance Lopez went actively to work near Tlascala, making a navy yard in the midst of the mountains of Mexico!

Everything being prepared, Cortes assembled his men and allies to sweep the entire region round, and accordingly set forth from Tlascala, and pursued a route which lay through the outside circuit of the Aztec territory.

Just previous to setting out on this expedition, Tecalco noticed one evening, towards nightfall, the fine figure of a tall Tlascalan strolling near the Christian quarters; as he approached, his fine intelligent eyes were bent upon her with an earnest interest, and he whispered with a gentle voice:

“Maiden, is not thy name Tecalco? and art thou not a daughter of Montezuma? Fear not to answer me; I have learned that thou art an unwilling captive to the Christian, is this so?”

“Noble stranger,” answered the princess, “there seems a beam of sympathy in thine eye, and a look that I may trust, but ere I bare the tale of my fate to thee, instruct me who thou art.”

"I," answered the Tlascalan, "was once an enemy of thy father, and of thy people, but now my anger is turned against our common enemy, these cruel-hearted Christians."

"But thy name?" asked the maiden.

"Fair lady," answered the other, "it was once Xicotencatl, but now I am none other than a dispirited wanderer of Tlascala."

"Xicotencatl!" exclaimed the princess, "Xicotencatl! the brave, the fiery, the proud-hearted hero of a hundred battles;—oh! generous and gallant soldier, how my heart throbs to behold thee! Thou canst save me—thou wilt. It never yet was known that the daring in fight should be deaf to the weak."

"Beautiful Tecalco!" replied the Tlascalan, "by the honor of a warrior I pledge thee, if Xicotencatl's hand, heart, or head can aid thee, thou hast but to command and he will execute."

"Enough," said the princess, "I perceive we are watched—at midnight thou shalt hear from me." With these words she parted from the Tlascalan prince. True to her word, at the midnight hour, a servant came to the palace of the prince, and placed in his hands a package of aloe leaves, upon which were much writing and figures in cypher.

"It shall reach Guatemozin," said Xicotencatl, and the messenger departed without replying.

The eye of the dawn had not opened, when a trusty carrier of the prince, with the packet in his possession, was far on his route towards the capital, hastening with an arrowy speed over plain and vale, with his master's message; and before the second night-fall, the faithful messenger demanded audience at the door of the emperor Guatemozin's palace. He called for the lord in person, and he came. The bearer delivered his dispatches, and the emperor bade his officers see the Tlascalan well bestowed. Guatemozin went into the chamber where his, now wife, the lovely and majestic Tecuiclipa sat. He unfolded the paper-like leaves, and scarce had his eye rested upon the characters, when a glow of rapturous delight ran over his face, and sparkled with a speaking beauty in his eyes.

"What," cried Tecuiclipa, "have the Tlascalans turned against their pale-faced leaders?"

"Nay," returned Guatemozin, "but the lost jewel of our race is found! the dead is restored! Tecalco lives!"

"Lives!" eagerly questioned the prince's beautiful wife, "where?"

"In the camp of Cortes," replied Guatemozin, "and prays for succor at our hands. Shall I dispatch a messenger, and offer to ransom her? I would hold the treasures of the crown light, compared with her liberty; nay, I would drain the coffers of the empire to redeem her, or sell a province for her safety. Or shall I raise an army, and follow the footsteps of her captors?"

"Nay," replied Tecuiclipa, "leave this to me. I see Malmiztic coming, and I will open the news to him."

At this moment the Toltec entered the chamber; his large eyes were overcast with settled sorrow, and the proud dignity of his bearing seemed broken, as he approached them with a slow-paced step.

Guatemozin motioned him to a seat upon the lounge beside them. The Toltec sat, and Tecuiclipa began,

"How fares our friend, the philosopher?"

"May it please you, gracious lady," returned the Toltec, "malady of the body hath not befallen me."

"But," remarked Tecuiclipa, "I mark a malady of the mind hath of late brooded upon thy brow."

"True, royal lady," answered the other, "let us not speak of the cause. I have been teaching my heart the lesson of forgetfulness. I have said to my soul, 'close thy wearied eyes, and watch no longer for the invisible.'"

"But Malmiztic, tell me," said the empress, "are spirits never visible upon this earth?"

"Gracious lady, thy question taxes me narrowly to answer," replied the Toltec, "I have seen beings ere the breath hath parted from the frame, and while the mind hath apparently its reason, on sudden start, and talk with the vacant air, and point to unseen spirits; and now, albe it that I have rated this a distemper of the blood, and a mal-action of the functions of the brain, caused by physical disquietude, yet I am far from denying that the incorporeal inhabitants of other worlds may move in this, or

that the spirit, parted from its habitation of clay, may not revisit the scenes of its earthly existence ; but the mortal eye, dimmed by its own materiality, may not scan the mysteries of nature. There are things of this earth which I have failed to fathom, even with deepest pondering. I have met spots in my wanderings, where my feet had never rested before, and yet, each object wore a look as if I had known it for years. I have met men in my walk of life, strangers from stranger lands, whose countenances were old familiar faces, and came upon me like the friends of gone-by days. I have sat in silence by men, and anticipated; ere they have spoken, the words which they were about to utter, even when there was no foregoing link of thought to chain itself to my presentiment. And in sleep, when fancy is brightest, and reason partly, and sometimes wholly dormant, I have had dreams which time has turned into truths ; and, in a word, which are the fictions, and which the realities of mortal being, I cannot say."

"But, Malmiztic," said Tecuiclipa, "if thou couldst see the spirit of Tecalco, what wouldst thou give?"

"To see Tecalco?" said the Toltec.

"Ay," replied the other, "to behold her form, and speak with her again."

"Lady," answered Malmiztic, with enthusiasm, "for a single glimpse upon her face, even for an instant, I would give my fortune, all my goods of earth, and toil as a slave for the remainder of my life, made contented and happy by that one look. And could I but speak to her, I would give a year of existence in exchange for every word!"

"Malmiztic," answered the empress, "I will test thy fidelity—Tecalco lives!"

The Toltec sprang from his seat, and clasping his hands together, fell upon one knee before Tecuiclipa.

"Sovereign lady," exclaimed he, "speak those words again ; but, oh ! royal mistress, do not make me the victim of maddening delusion."

"Rise, Malmiztic," replied the empress, "it is true ; a messenger has arrived from the Tlascalan, Xicotencatl, who hath spoken with her in the camp of Cortes. Now, canst thou find one willing to rescue her?"

"I can," instantly replied the Toltec.

"Where?" said Tecuiclipa.

"Here!" returned the other, in a moment, rising to his feet, "here is one who will follow her forever!" and suddenly turning to Guatemozin, he continued: "My lord, I have a favor to ask of you."

"It is granted," replied the emperor, "ere thou canst express it, be it what it may."

"I would have one of those strange animals which we captured from the Christians upon the causeway in that gloomy but glorious night."

"A horse!" exclaimed Guatemozin.

"Ay, may it please you, my sovereign," answered the Toltec.

"Dost thou ask it for a sacrifice?" questioned the emperor.

"Nay, my lord," returned the other, "it is not my custom to offer other sacrifices than those of flowers. I would put the animal I ask for, to use."

"Thou shalt have it," replied Guatemozin, "if it can serve thee; but I would not have you trust yourself with its management."

"Enough, my lord," added the Toltec, with a brighter eye, and a step elastic with animation; "trust me to guide the animal, and bring the maiden back."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN a short time Malmiztic had mounted one of the noble steeds which had been captured by the Mexicans, and as he passed through the streets bestriding the animal, the Aztec multitude poured forth in such throngs that they filled both sides of the way, while the priests were enraged that their sacrifice should be taken from them, and the populace trembled with fear and superstition to behold the Toltec mounted upon the strange animal, and moving away upon it as if he were a Christian cavalier.

He bent his course towards Tlascala, while the wondering populace turned back to muse upon the magic of the mighty Malmiztic.

As the noble beast caught the fresh air of the country, he bounded away beautifully, as if glad to escape from the confinement of the town. In a short time, the city lay far behind the horse and rider, and plain and hill, meadow and mountain were passed until the setting sun found them outside of the Aztec territory, and more than half way to the city of Tlascala.

Malmiztic checked the animal at a cottage door which stood on the skirt of a forest. The tenants beheld the steed, and deeming it a monster fled for their lives. Malmiztic dismounted and entered the vacant tenement, after having secured his horse, rested himself, but slept but little for the night.

When the angels of the morning raised their silver spears of light over the eastern walls of heaven, Malmiztic was again journeying towards Tlascala; before nightfall the towers of the city were seen gilded by the evening sun.

Meeting a peasant in the highway, the Toltec inquired in what part of the city the Christians were quartered. The other informed him that they had started upon a campaign against the

neighboring provinces, and pointed out a trail which marked their course across the plains and through the forest.

Malmiztic instantly started off in pursuit of the Christian camp, and as day declined, fresh evidences of the troops could be seen in every mile. The tracks of horses and of men, the marks of fire where they had halted, all plainly proved that he was fast approaching the party of Cortes.

Again night fell, and the Toltec, weary from his unusual exercise, rested, and fed his gallant animal from a neighboring maize field, while he himself formed a pent-house of its stalks and leaves and lay upon a bed of the same material, as if it were a rich couch in one of his own palaces.

So doth love and hope ever soften the hard realities of life.

Morn blushed again, and by the yellow noon Malmiztic descried, in the distance, the rear skirt of Cortes' army, which was composed of Tlascalans.

All day long he hovered in sight, as the army moved forward, using the utmost caution not to be discovered by them. At length, the friendly cover of darkness came to his aid, and he beheld the troops halt, and fix their tents for the night, in a fine grove of tall trees.

At sunset a few clouds shaded the heavens, and the early part of the evening was gloomy, but as the night advanced, the moon came up in her full-orbed splendor, and shed a white light upon the quiet camp of Cortes.

All was silent around ; the wearied troops, after their evening meal, slept profoundly, and sound after sound ceased to be heard, except the even tread of the sentinel upon his watch, or some movement within the tents, of a cavalier preparing his rough resting-place, or a more pious soldier offering up his Ave or Pater, previous to trusting his soul and body to the guardian spirits of the night.

The moon had climbed to the meridian, and all the noisy evidences of life were hushed ; a death stillness reigned over the white tents, whose loose canvass flapped slowly in the night breeze.

In a tent near the quarters of Cortes was the princess, Tecalco, and in the same tent, partly as a companion, but chiefly as a

guardian or keeper, was Marina, the beautiful interpreter, whom Cortes had charged with the custody of the Aztec maiden. A figure approached the tent, tall, handsome, and active—it was Alvarado—he came quietly to the doorway, or rather opening in the tent, and in a low but rich, melodious voice, whispered :

“Marina, let me speak with thee.”

“Who calls?” demanded the girl of Tobasco.

“Alvarado,” answered the other.

Marina rose, and throwing a loose mantle about her fine figure, came to the cavalier.

“I have a word for thee, lovely Marina,” said Alvarado, with his most sweet and insinuating smile. “Why dost thou not gain the love of Cortes? I speak at once frankly; why dost thou let his heart wander from thee?”

“It has not gone astray,” returned the maiden.

“Alas!” replied the other, “how hopelessly blind is fond love! Canst thou not see that he has grown cold towards thee?”

“True,” returned the maid, “he was once more kind, but yet he loves me well.”

“Loves thee! deluded girl, he loathes thee, and but for thy services in talk with native kings and chiefs, would banish thee to-morrow. Where now are all the former gentle favors shown to thee? Where are those many kindnesses with which thou wert formerly greeted by all?”

“Alas! Alvarado,” she replied, “they have indeed grown less, but yet for the love of Cortes, I would bear a thousand greater ills. I were blest as his slave, if I could share his love.”

“Oh! how dull to sight thou art!” exclaimed the wily Spaniard; “here, by thy side, at this moment, he is bearing with him one to supplant thee in his affections, and drive thy memory from his heart.”

“Where?” exclaimed the Indian maid, and her bosom heaved with agitation.

“Where!” reiterated Alvarado, “why, there!” pointing his finger to the form of Tecalco, who was sleeping within.

The eye of the angered serpent blazes not more sudden or brilliantly than did the dark orbs of Marina, as the shrewd

Spaniard touched her heart with this barb of jealousy. Her whole countenance changed in an instant, and her lips quivered, as she exclaimed ;

“Christian, I conjure you, by the name of the Virgin, answer me ; is this true ?”

“By Santiago, as I live,” he replied, “Cortes means nothing more or less than that thou shalt be the keeper for the victim of his passionate desire.”

“By heaven !” said the Tobascan girl, and her rich, red lips blanched as she spake, “It shall not be ! mortal woman shall not snatch him from my arms. If other hands cling about his neck, I will sever them like the tendrils of a poison-vine. Alvarado !” exclaimed she, starting to her feet, “the dark eyes of that enchantress have rested upon Cortes, and spell-bound him with their beauty. Those magic stars must cease to shine ; they shed rays of maddening witchery upon the waters of his soul !”

“Who would think,” returned the Spaniard, “that she who would wrest the love of Cortes from thee, could sleep so sweetly ?”

“She shall sleep more soundly,” said Marina, in a deep and fearful tone.

“Nay, by the Virgin, thou must not injure her,” interposed the cavalier, “or the wrath of Cortes will fall fearfully upon thee.”

“Why should I fear wrath ?” answered she, “when love is gone, what is life ? Two images must not play upon the fountain of his heart. He must not see her again alive !”

“Heavens ! Marina,” said Alvarado, with well-feigned astonishment, “you would not murder her ?”

“She or I must die !” said the frantic woman.

“Nay,” said Alvarado, “thou shalt not plunge thy soul thus into perdition for this girl. I have a scheme—she shall be mine.”

“Good !” instantly exclaimed Marina, “but what canst thou do to accomplish this ?”

“I will bear her to a peasant’s cottage, hard by, and secrete her, and in the morning Cortes will be far on his march, before he shall discover that she is gone.

“It is well,” replied Marina, something more calmly.

“Come, then,” said Alvarado, “awaken her, and bid her meet

Cortes by the skirt of yon forest; she will not dare refuse. When thou hast reached it, thou wilt find me in readiness there; return thou, then, without loss of time, and leave the rest to me."

"Enough," answered Marina, and Alvarado departed. But as he passed out of the doorway of the tent, a dark figure glided behind a clump of trees at hand, without being discovered by Alvarado.

Marina then entered the tent, and gently awakened the beautiful princess, who slept within, and communicated to her the pretended order of the Spanish general. Tecalco willingly, but wonderingly complied with the mandate, and the two moved off in the direction of the wood, hard by, where they were soon joined by Alvarado. At this moment, Marina, at a sign from the Spaniard, suddenly turned about and disappeared, before the astonished girl could recover from her surprise. Alvarado instantly seized upon her; Tecalco gave a scream, but Alvarado throwing an arm around her neck, laid his hand upon her mouth, and with the other drew his sword, and threatened instant death if she murmured.

The princess, terrified and overpowered, fell upon her knees, while the hot-blooded Spaniard bent down and printed his kisses thick upon her lips. The maiden struggled in his embrace for a moment, and suddenly fainted, when with a tremendous rush, a horseman charging through the black shadows of the thick grove, came upon them, and in another instant, a blow from a blade which gleamed like a meteor, glanced upon Alvarado's skull, but only stunned him, although he fell as if dead. In a moment more, an arm, as if of a giant, lifted the form of Tecalco from the earth, and swung her up before him upon the steed, and dashed away, just as Alvarado was rising to his feet.

"A Christian!" exclaimed the astounded knight, "a cavalier! a fellow-soldier. In the name of the Virgin who can this be?"

By the white gleams of the moon, the knight descried a glimpse of the horseman and his burthen, flying like a black cloud, past the distant groups of aloe, and in the next instant plunging into the thick-leaved groves, whose dark shades were silvered over by the moon.

Alvarado hurried back to the camp, and seeing Marina, agreed

upon a tale; he next ran to arouse Cortes, who immediately called up the whole camp, and gave pursuit according to the directions of Alvarado and Marina, who described the horseman as having rushed like a flash of lightning to the tent, and seizing the princess, made to the woods hard by, followed by Alvarado, who called upon the guard ineffectually, but at length overtook the bold intruder, who, wheeling upon Alvarado, gave him this tremendous blow, which felled him to the earth.

When Cortes had caught this tale, he instantly mounted his steed, and flew to the spot which Alvarado had described, and there he could plainly discover, by the moon's light upon the earth, the tracks of a horse with shoes on. Cortes instantly ordered the horses to be counted; the full number were found in their places; again and again they were told, and with a like result.

The Indian sentinel, who had been fast asleep, by whose post he was said to have passed, said that at first he had supposed it to be a man, and that afterwards it assumed the shape of a horse, and that suddenly it appeared as a mounted cavalier, carrying a lady in his arms, and that the strange animal had risen in the air, and mounted, until it had lifted itself over the top of the neighboring groves, and pursued its way aloft through the moonlit air, until it had dwindled to a small, black cloud in the distance!

This marvelous story Cortes paid no regard to, but calling his men, set out as fast as possible, in the direction suggested by Alvarado.

The horsemen galloped hard to overtake the mysterious fugitive, but although they scoured every grove, thicket or copse in the vicinity, nothing could be seen of the strange rider and horse which had borne away from the enraged Cortes the beautiful daughter of Montezuma.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE old mower, Time, had made few strokes with his scythe, before Hernando Cortes began to make his sallies upon the rebellious provinces, and in these forays the might of Christian mind, and power of European invention, invariably carried all before them.

Town after town resisted, but as surely fell; and village upon village blazed from the torches of its own inhabitants, who, flying with their families and lighter goods, sought shelter in the fastnesses of the mountains.

In one of these distant towns, known afterwards as Puebla Moreasca, the Spaniards came upon a sight which froze their blood with horror: in a vast edifice of stone, with white-washed walls, after the frightened inhabitants had evacuated the city, the Spaniards found a large room which had been used as a prison, and upon the wall was a hand-writing in blood, saying:

“Here the unfortunate Juan Yuste and his associates were confined and tortured.”

From this, Cortes and his followers passed into another room, where they shuddered to behold the tanned skins and beards of their former companions, who had been captured while on a foraging excursion. This sight excited the ire of Cortes to the highest degree, and he laid waste the whole country, until he came to the city of Cuernavaca, which was situated upon the pinnacle of a mountain whose precipitous sides were almost inaccessible, and which, from its height of rocky crags, seemed to laugh defiance upon the Spaniards.

At the base of the mountain rushed a roaring torrent, which cut off the approach of the Christians, it went driving and whirling through the narrow gorge or ravine, and its eddying foam, boiling in its bed, rushed over rocks and played in

whirlpools far down the ravine, which was filled with rank vegetation and overhung with forest trees almost black in the luxuriance of their leaves, which gave a deep shadowy gloom to the glen below.

There was no ford, and the inhabitants had destroyed the bridges which spanned the stream, and the Spaniards were thus held completely aloof.

At length, the daring Sandoval descried two trees, one upon each bank of the stream, whose branches nearly met in air midway over the water. The knight boldly climbed out to the dizzy and dangerous end of one of the limbs of the tree, and seizing the bough of the opposite tree, he swung himself with great agility fairly across the gulf, and caught in the stouter branches of the other tree, and was soon upon the opposing bank, where he was hailed by cheers from his companions.

Emboldened by his example, others soon followed ; but at length three Indians, less active, having their temerity excited, essayed to cross, when a treacherous branch broke and precipitated them from their giddy eminence down into the torrent ; two were fortunate enough to fall in the water, but the third, striking on the rocks over which the stream rushed, broke his thigh, and it was with difficulty that his companions could save him from drowning.

At length, ropes were got across, and the party passed over and began to ascend the mountain, when the enemy, being prepared for them, commenced to hurl large stones and rocks down the declivity. Cortes pressed hard up the hill, followed by his soldiery, but the stream of stones which came, thickened momentarily, until there was no method of avoiding or escaping them. The inhabitants collected upon the summit, and with shouts let loose the fragments, which came bounding down the steep sides with destructive rapidity. Great numbers of the troops of Cortes were severely wounded, and every effort to mount seemed likely to be repulsed, when Cortes, with the cry of "Castile, forever !" leaped into a narrow path which afforded a more secure footing, and by this means a few gained the top, and by their valor forced back the whole body who were engaged in hurling stones and missiles down the mountain side.

In a short time the whole Spanish force had reached the summit, and poured into the city, where they wrought fearful havoc among the inhabitants, who stoutly opposed them; but by night-fall the fiery cavaliers of the Cross had routed the brave pagans, and had full possession of their city of the mountain top.

This stronghold being carried, Cortes turned his course, and swept the whole region before him, until he once more stood upon the mountain wall which girded round the glorious valley of the lakes.

He next prepared to attack Xochimilco (the field of flowers), the beautiful city on the lake of the same name; but here he found that terrible resistance was to be expected, for Guatemozin had assembled there immense numbers, who met Cortes and his men in conflict with heroic firmness; but notwithstanding the vast multitude, and their resolute demeanor, the glittering banner of the Cross carried victory before it, and the shout which went up for Spain and St. James was soon heard in the heart of the city, from which the inhabitants were pursued with fearful slaughter.

But while the Spaniards were pursuing the Aztecs, a band from Mexico, headed by Malmiztic, all armed with steel blades, which had been taken at the terrible battle of Noche Triste, burst upon the Christians suddenly, and the dismay of the latter was terrific. Amazed to behold bright steel blades in the hands of the adversary, instead of maquahuitls, the Christians became confused, and would have been completely overwhelmed, had not Cortes turned the whole tide of his power upon the small party, who, seeing the disparity of numbers, and the flight of the citizens, soon gained their boats upon the lakes, and stood away for Mexico.

Cortes now completely invested the splendid city of Xochimilco. From this point he began an entire circuit of the lakes. The inhabitants of the various towns upon the border fought fiercely, being roused by Guatemozin to a pitch of enmity against the Christians; but conquest and subjugation was the fate of every city or village which opposed the progress of Cortes and his allies.

Thus every day brought news of the capitulation of some city

upon the route, and chieftain after chieftain, and lord upon lord, surrendered themselves to the irresistible Christian commander, until he had traversed the entire circuit of the lakes, halting at length at Tezcuco, at which great city he was joined by a new troop of soldiers from Vera Cruz, and a body of Tlascalans, under the brave Xicotencatl.

Cortes now made a grand review, and found his forces to consist of more than a thousand Christians, and seventy-five thousand allies. This immense multitude congregated in the spacious market-place of the city of Tezcuco, of which place Cortes had made Ixtliloxchitl king; and here Cortes communicated his design of besieging the metropolis.

Shortly after this review, came the grand affair of launching the thirteen brigs, which had been built in Tlascala and transported to the lakes. It was a sight of great joy to the Christians to behold the white sails spread to the breeze upon those beautiful lakes, where never before floated other craft than arrowy canoes and narrow barges. But to the Mexicans it was a work of magic, at which they gazed with wonder and amazement.

And now, the order of battle was made known, which was, namely, that they should enter on the three different sides of the city at once, by the respective causeways.

While Cortes was making these active and grand preparations, one Antonio de Villafaña, a dark and malignant traitor, conspired to take the life of the general. By sily circulating evil reports among the new comers, the conspirator managed to produce a disaffection, which was increasing to an alarming extent. It was designed to steal into his quarters by night, and assassinate him. The scheme of this cold-blooded murder was communicated to Alvarado, it being suspected that there was a degree of jealousy or rivalry existing between the knight and his commander; but Alvarado, with the true spirit of a proud-hearted Spanish hidalgo, was no sooner master of the damnable design, than he proceeded forthwith to Cortes, and disclosed all that had been divulged to him. The general was thunder-struck. Having heard the whole plot, and thanked Alvarado for his integrity, he deliberately proceeded to examine Villafaña, after having arrested him. During his examination, the traitor manifested some

uneasiness in regard to something about his person, and the quick eye of Cortes detected in his bosom a scroll of paper, which the general instantly seized upon. The conspirator started back, appalled and trembling; his face became a livid white, and his knees smote each other, while the iron-nerved Cortes, after fixing his piercing eyes full upon the confused conspirator, leisurely proceeded to peruse the scroll, which contained a full and detailed account of the manner in which Cortes was to be destroyed, and the subsequent disposition of the forces.

Cortes called for his officers, and read the fatal scroll, and then drew from his own pocket the military regulations of the army; and in the presence of the company, pronounced the sentence of martial law upon Antonio de Villafañá.

On the morrow, while yet the morning wore her robes of grey, from the window of a conspicuous house in Tezcucó, the stiff body of the conspirator could be seen hanging by the neck, while the multitude gazed upon the dark face of the strangled traitor. Not a sympathetic word was uttered, not a look of commiseration was given, but the foul carcass hung at the window all day long, an object of horror, disgust and loathing, and many a pale face could be seen in the multitude, of those who participated in his crime, but Cortes pushed his punishment no farther; he had made a sudden and startling example, and the impression produced thereby, was one not easily to be eradicated, either from the memory of his own men, or the thousands of allies who witnessed the terrible end of the conspirator.

All the cities around the entire border of the lakes, had now submitted to the Christian conqueror; but in Iztapalapan, there were quartered a number of Mexicans, who used every opportunity to thwart the movements of the Christians, and there Guatemozin had covertly placed Malmiztic with a body of brave Aztecs, whose occasional sallies annoyed the Spanish general to the highest degree, until he determined to rout and dislodge this hidden enemy, or level the city upon its site. Accordingly he dispatched Sandoval and Alvarado to fall upon it by night; but the eye of Malmiztic had marked their preparation, and provided for it accordingly; and he likewise advised Guatemozin of his suspi-

cions, and urged him to send a fleet of canoes across to their support as soon as the darkness had fallen upon the waters.

Night came on, and the Spaniards entered the city, and the conflict commenced. Every square was contested with obstinate valor. The Spaniards steadily progressed, but it was at the sword's point. The Aztecs stood their ground with an unparalleled firmness, and not in one point alone, but in every portion of the city the contest raged hand to hand, and if for a moment the Aztec host fell back, it was but to form anew, and return to the fray with redoubled ardor.

Surprised and vexed at this unwonted firmness of the enemy, Sandoval suddenly determined to lay waste the city before them, by fire, and in a brief space of time, the red torches could be seen hurrying hither and thither through the darkness of the night, and the fierce element, kindling rapidly, soon threw up a glare whose fiery shadow fell upon the lake and lighted the land, revealing the combatants in their sanguinary strife, with shouts which startled the sleeping echoes of the valley.

At length the Aztecs retired, fighting slowly, and the soldiers of Cortes began to pillage and burn every house in their way. In the meantime, Malmiztic had collected the Aztec forces, and retired to the farther side of the city, where all, or most of their canoes were stationed, and instantly he began the work of demolishing the embankment, which kept one of the lakes from overflowing the city, which was situated considerably below the level of the water. The Aztec myriads worked with the industry and activity of bees. In a short time the earth and timber were torn away, and the vast volume of water burst through in a tremendous torrent, sweeping everything in its impetuous course. The Aztecs fled for safety to their boats, and had scarcely time to gain them, when the powerful current swept their craft far out into the lake.

And now the Spaniards, who were making a universal bonfire of the town, and kindling flames whose lurid glare gleamed crimson upon the waters, were suddenly amazed to behold a torrent come rolling in upon them, swallowing up everything living, in its mad course.

There was no time for orders, every Spaniard fled whithersoever his mind prompted him, and the consternation of the horsemen was scarcely less great than the confusion of the infantry. A large number of the allies were overwhelmed, and the night growing dark, rendered escape more difficult than ever. At length the commander of the Christians, with the major part of his troops, gained the highest ground of the city, and leaving their horses in the care of a strong body of soldiery, in a fortified and elevated position, took advantage of some boats, and crossed to Tezcuco. And, as Cortes himself said, in a letter to the emperor of Spain, "When it was daylight, we saw the water of one lake was on a level with the water of the other, and there was no current, and all the salt lake was covered with canoes filled with warriors."

This repulse was far from dispiriting the courageous Cortes, and in a short time he was again prepared to make an attack upon the great city itself, its tributaries being all cut off. But at this time, Cortes heard the news that Xicotencatl, the Tlascalan chieftain, becoming disaffected, was about to withdraw, with some ten thousand of his troops, and return to his capital of Tlascala. The general waited until Xicotencatl had started, when he had him arrested as a deserter! In vain the noble warrior pleaded his independence and perfect right to retire from the service of Cortes at will, but the Spanish commander held his formal court, and pronounced him a traitor and a deserter, and that as such, he must suffer death!

At this, Alvarado rose in the council, and in the most powerful and pathetic manner, spoke in behalf of the Tlascalan chieftain, lauding his gallantry, his firmness and patriotism, and the perfect faith with which he kept all prior pledges.

For this speech, Cortes rose and censured Alvarado in severe terms, and again expressed his fixed determination to carry out the sentence of the law.

But once more, Alvarado replied, and with that impassioned eloquence and earnestness which thrilled the hearts of the hearers, while his own handsome face, lighted up by animation and interest for the unfortunate prince, contrasted powerfully with the compressed lips and knitted brows of his general.

Alvarado spoke with burning words and an impulsive enthusiasm, and dwelt feelingly upon the lofty and chivalric character of the young chief, and the little necessity there would be for his troops or aid, while daily thousands of natives of the region round poured into the camp of Cortes. But in spite of all interference or entreaty, the iron-souled conqueror sternly insisted upon carrying his decree into effect ; and it was soon carried through the camp of Cortes and his allies, who had now swelled to the vast number of two hundred and forty thousand, that Xicotencatl, the brave, the heroic, the most noble Tlascalan must die !

The veterans, who had looked with stern complacency upon the execution of Villafañá, murmured among themselves and wore gloomy brows of silent disapprobation.

The gallows was erected in the public square of Tezcuco, and the manly captive was brought forth. Thousands flocked around, with looks of painful sympathy, as the soldiers led the victim towards the scaffold.

At this point, the feelings of Alvarado overcame him, and stepping forth from his place among the crowd, he exclaimed, in a bold tone :

“Don Hernando Cortes, as a Spanish knight and a nobleman, I protest against this proceeding, in the name of our order, and by the holiness of the Virgin !”

“What means this daring presumption ?” said the general, turning upon the speaker with a fierce scowl.

“It means,” said Alvarado, with a look as bold and fierce as the other, “that I here enter my protest against this military murder ! and demand justice, rather than claim clemency for the free chieftain, Xicotencatl.”

“This,” said Cortes, with a bitter and sarcastic look, “comes with admirable grace from the man who massacred the whole host of Mexican nobles in cold blood.”

At these words, Alvarado withered, and retired without a word into the crowd.

“Proceed with the execution !” said the stern, cold conqueror, and obedient officials moved to execute the mandate.

The soldiers led the condemned noble up on the scaffold—the

word was given, and the heroic Tlascalán swung off with a convulsive struggle, and was no more !

Tears started from the eyes of veteran cavaliers—tears were upon the brown and sunburnt cheeks of men unused to weep.—But the eye of Hernando Cortes flashed fiercely, and his compressed lips were riveted.

The meek-eyed angel of Pity gave a glance at his countenance, and turning her blue eyes hopelessly to heaven, heaved a sad sigh, and departed.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was the thirteenth day of May, in the year fifteen hundred and twenty-one, according to Clavigero, that the Spanish general, Don Hernando Cortes, with a thousand Spaniards, and two hundred and forty thousand allies, began the siege of the great city of Mexico.

Upon the silver waters of lake Tezcuco floated a fleet, consisting of thirteen brigs, rigged and equipped under the direction of Martin Lopez, and now bearing, as commander of the whole, the Spanish general in person.

Alvarado was posted in Tacuba, with one hundred and seventy Castilians, and twenty-five thousand allies, together with some thirty horses; and about the like amount of force, under Christoval de Olid, commanded Coyoacan; while Gonzales de Sandoval, with a still greater power, occupied the city of Iztapalapan, upon the south.

Thus the respective parties were stationed at the heads of the causeways which led from the main land, upon the west, the north, and the south, into the mighty metropolis.

The first great master-stroke which Cortes now made, was to demolish the aqueduct, that splendid piece of masonry which led the fresh, bright waters of the distant hill of Chapoltepec through the blue and briny lake, in a solid cemented tunnel, into the city, and filled its thousand reservoirs.

There were wise heads in Tenochtitlan, to whom the cutting off of this aqueduct was more startling than the approach of the thousands upon the land, and the fleet upon the waters. But, to show the Spaniards that they could supply themselves from the main land, by their boats, whole fleets of canoes sallied forth, and returned laden with water—and piraguas, filled with fruit

and corn, temptingly ploughed their way across the lake, and entered the besieged city.

One day, however, while a fleet of boats were crossing, Cortes suddenly weighed anchor, and with his sails spread, bore down upon them rapidly, with the whole squadron. With a fair wind the brigs sheared the bright waves of the ruffled lake, while the Aztecs, alarmed at this sudden and strange sight, sought safety by flight towards the land, but the paddles were vainly plied, the swift ships swept down upon them, gaining every instant, until suddenly a burst of thunder roared over the Elysian lake, and the groups of canoes were seen scattered and flying to fragments, as the lightning flash came forth, and the black and white wreaths of smoke rolled in vast billows over the water and mounted to the blue skies. Again, peal upon peal broke forth, and shook the walls of the palaces, and reverberated in the encircling chain of mountains which girded the valley of the lakes, and the heavy balls, striking the light craft, shivered them to splinters.

While the crews of the brigs were thus engaged, the terrified enemy flew in all directions to escape; this, a part of them with difficulty accomplished, and gained the shore, but the bosom of the lake swelled with shattered wrecks of great numbers of the canoes, and all over the face of the water floated fragments which had been torn away by the terrible enginery of the Christians.

This disastrous stroke made the Aztecs more cautious and prudent thereafter respecting their bold essays upon the water.

Shortly afterwards, Cortes, with his brigs, sailed along by the causeways, and raked them with his cannon, sweeping down everything before the might of the great guns, which startled the hearts of the Aztecs.

Day after day, the several divisions under the different Spanish commanders, advanced upon the city, and Cortes continued to batter the buildings and barriers along the causeways, which the indefatigable Guatemozin defended and re-established, until the Christian had reached the end of the great avenue where it entered the suburbs, filling up, as he passed, all breaches in the causeway, in order to afford a highway for his horses and artillery.

Scarce had he gained this point, when the Aztecs fell upon him with unusual fierceness, and the swarming masses disputed the streets with Cortes, and from the terraced roofs of the buildings poured a rattling storm of missiles upon the heads of the invaders, which, though almost ineffective upon the men in mail, sorely wounded the defenceless soldiers and allies in their simple doublets of quilted cotton.

Thus, constantly advancing against the tide of war, Cortes, after many days of hard and bloody fighting, came in sight of his ancient quarters, the palace of Axajacatl, and the great temple of Huitzilopotchtli; but between himself and those points could be seen constantly gathered along the distance, dark masses of Indian warriors, against whom there was no advancing, save amid the conflict of arms and the roaring shouts of battle.

In addition to these annoying warriors of Guatemozin, who rose with the dawn and battled in the moonlight, against all former Aztec custom, Cortes, and his captains upon the different causeways, had to contend with the elements, for though it was now far in June, the rainy season had begun, which lasts until September, and the ground under their feet was flooded, and their marches were with a heavy plashing through ponds and mire, while the pelting storms by day drenched them, and the chilling night winds swept over their unsheltered heads, with a shivering sigh, as they stood cold and cheerless on the causeways, or slumbered in the open air upon their arms, for often would they be hastily aroused by the vigilant Guatemozin bursting in upon them at the dead hour of midnight with his dark legions, rushing upon the stiff and wounded besiegers, whose daily attacks upon the outskirts of the city cost them many a life.

But the walls of stone, which the Aztec chief would rear, like magic, in a night, across the path of Cortes, the beating rains, and aguish winds, the night sallies of the natives, and the stiff wounds of his followers, turned not the steady purposes of Hernando Cortes.

Along his way of march he began to rear a line of barracks, which being built, shielded the troops from the inclemency of the weather, and sheltered them from the sharp showers of arrows which hurtled through the night air.

His work of demolition progressed day after day—his cannon would be planted before the face of some proud and ancient pile, and while the smaller ordnance swept the natives from the streets, walls of stone came thundering down, and from the fallen ruins Cortes had the stone carried to fill up the breaches of the causeway behind him; and while the commander, thus moving by lake and by land was penetrating the capital, from the side towards Iztapalapan, Alvarado and Sandoval, on the other causeways, were progressing towards the heart of the city with as much speed as the multitude of obstacles in their way, and the obstinate resistance of the natives, would admit.

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It was in the palace of the Aztec king, Guatemozin, that a party were seated by night. Upon the elegantly painted and ornamented walls fell the blaze of a hundred flambeaux, whose burning wood, saturated with gums, filled the apartment with a soft, sweet odor. Beside the emperor sat his own beautiful bride, peerless in her pale beauty, as the southern moon moving through the sky in a robe of clouds. Guatemozin gazed upon her with a look of love and pride; and the imperial beauty, majestic in her queenliness, sitting upon the same cushion, returned that look with the loftiness of an empress, and a face beaming with the fondest affection.

Close by them sat another couple, the Toltec, and a creature whose heavenly beauty, lighted by the happiness of the hour, won every heart around her, but chiefly his to whom she addressed herself.

“Ah! Malmiztic, I am too happy; I have not deserved of heaven so great a joy as this. The brightest-eyed hope which hath ever pictured the future of earth to me, hath never told of bliss like this. Through the darkest skies of our being, bright rays stream down from heaven upon the heart of faith; and faith, Malmiztic, told me that we should not be parted forever. Malmiztic, didst thou not pray for me? I did for thee, and I felt that the prayer which I whispered in the ear of heaven, would be borne by some young, bright-eyed angel, and breathed again in thine, and was happy in my wretchedness to know that thy God and mine could see us both at a glance, though one were on

earth and the other in heaven ; and I felt that though thou shouldst have been lost in the maze of untraversed worlds, I should have found thee, for my own soul had caught a spark of that God's own essence, whose whole being is love, and this should have lighted me on—this spark, this lamp, guiding me on through the dark wilderness of worlds, and illuminating voids upon the verge of creation—lending brightness to my soul's eyes, so that I should have known thee in the land of shadows, though around thy form multitudinous beings congregated, and mingled thick as the motes which float in the sunbeams."

"Tecalco," returned the Toltec, "if I have known days of despondency upon earth, this hour repays for all."

"Malmiztic," said Guatemozin, interrupting him, "Tecalco has spoken to me of the peril from which thou didst rescue her ; she has told me the deep, wild love she bears thee, and now I feel, as her nearest friend, that I must likewise speak. Our empire is beset by enemies—invasion is intruding upon us, and rebellion is rife throughout the realm. It is time to arouse, and nerve ourselves for the great blow. Mexico must either fall or be free ! I speak for my country, and not as the king. We need courage and wisdom to meet this sharp emergency. There is but one man in Mexico upon whom I can depend—that man is Malmiztic. Mines are being dug under the foundations of this kingdom ; let the enemy quietly work on, and we shall behold the giant palaces of our greatness totter, their walls crumble to ruins, and sink, a nameless wreck, upon their sites. I have but one aim in existence, and that aim is to restore the independence of our ancient realm. I am ready to meet the storm in its rage, and to combat for freedom with the foe, whilst an Aztec can be found to draw a bow or wield a maquahuatl. Let their great guns roar, their sharp swords ring until the air echoes with the sound ; let their proud fleet float upon the lake, and their banner of the cross blaze in the morning light ; their sulphurous smoke dim the broad sun at noontide—I will not yield or falter, though fire flourish its red torch over our homes, and famine feed upon our frames ; yea, though the blessed water fail us, my tongue shall parch, wither, and cleave to my mouth, ere it shall say welcome to the foe ! And now hear me ! thou must support me through this trying

hour. Thy valor and judgment must bear up mine, and even if I fall, stand thou still faithful for my native land, till not a Spanish foot treads on its soil, or not an Aztec lives to fight in its defence! When our gods fail, Malmiztic, call on thine. Shriek right and justice in the ear of heaven, and cease not till the very deities be moved by sympathy, for those who leave their corpses at the feet of advancing aggression. Listen to me, Malmiztic! thou art all a man should be, wise, pure and patriotic—bold as the bald-crowned eagle of the hills, and in the confidence of thy virtue and thy God, a thunderbolt in battle! Tecalco loves thee, the child of Montezuma sees thy godlike qualities, and worships them. Now hear me, I am her protector, in virtue, her brother, but until thou hast said that thou wilt hold out with me to the last hour, she never shall be thine!”

“Nay!” cried Tecalco, pale as a water-lily, “forbear to bind him thus, proud Guatemozin; wouldst thou break my heart?”

“Peace!” said the Toltec, calmly, “the promise goes not hard with me—my heart is in the cause, and happier thrice shall I feel when I have helped to stay the falling structure of our ancient throne.”

“Ay!” cried Guatemozin, eagerly, “thou shalt sit beside ourselves, and smile to see our empire free as air! Gods! what a joy, once more to see the dove of peace build its soft nest upon our fathers’ roofs, and then, Malmiztic, shall thy hands be joined forever, and feasts shall be given thee that would be a banquet for the gods! strains of rich music shall swell around thee in splendid palaces, and gems shall glitter in thy coronet; and brighter than them all shall shine the green-leaved garland which wreathes the hero’s brow, who has dared the red lightning of the storm of fate, and fought till peace and sunshine settled on his head!”

“Trust me to act for thee and thine,” said the Toltec, “as time and power are given to me.”

At this moment, messengers were announced from Cortes, demanding a cessation of hostilities and a surrender of the city. The dark eyes of Guatemozin flashed fire as the proposal was made to him.

"Return!" replied he, "to your Christian commander, and ask him if he thinks another Montezuma reigns in Mexico?"

The tone and manner of the noble Aztec were unmistakable—the deputation departed.

"Thus," said Guatemozin, firmly, as he paced back and forth in the palace hall, "do I repel their hollow offerings of peace, and plant myself beside the banner of the golden eagle and the cactus!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

ALVARADO had entered the city upon the causeway from Tacuba, and gradually advanced without having any communication with his general; his sallies were bold and rapid, but they were met by the most obstinate and fearless opposition, and daily were high and chivalric feats of single opponents observed in the streets, or upon the causeways, as the nobility of Mexico would issue forth to meet the fierce Castilians. And the whole troop of Alvarado's men were daily astonished by the sudden appearance of a mysterious-looking man in a black mask, who, with the most hardy temerity, advanced rapidly up to the very tents of the camp, and hurling a stone from a sling into the midst of the cavaliers, would return to the Aztec multitude. Vexed and enraged by this bold intruder, Alvarado sent a challenge, which was proclaimed within hearing of both hostile lines, daring the mask to single combat.

Alvarado walked proudly out in front of the ranks, his elegant and graceful figure cased in a complete suit of steel, which sparkled and flashed in the sunshine, and stood in a noble attitude of defiance before the whole body of Mexicans. The opposing ranks gazed in mute admiration, but no one moved in the lines of Mexico to meet the champion of the Christian camp, who, seeing that he was not to be opposed, turned scornfully, and began to return to his companions, when suddenly a commotion in the crowd caused him to halt, and looking back, he beheld coming out in front of the Aztec multitude the figure of the mask, clad from top to toe in a complete sheathing of copper armor, whose red surface was polished until it glittered brilliantly in the sunshine.

Like the Spaniard, he carried sword and shield, and in a few moments they stood face to face, silently surveying each other

from foot to head, and measuring, as it were, the might of the antagonist before engaging with him in conflict.

"Who art thou," said the Spaniard, "that darest presume to meet Don Pedro de Alvarado?—a true knight of Santiago and Castile!—a Christian defender of the Cross of Christ and the holy sepulchre of Jerusalem!"

"I am one," answered the mask, "who comes to prove thee a false-hearted coward, a villain, who grossly wronged and insulted an unprotected woman!—and she, the noblest scion of our imperial tree of kings, sends me to visit vengeance on thy craven head, and force shame into thy hollow heart!"

"Thou brazen, copper-clad infidel!" said Alvarado, with his voice almost choking with rage; "thou insolent, presumptuous pagan! wert thou the commander of Malta, I'd make thee answer for those words, and dash thee into the dust in spite of the devil, who is leagued with thee. So, Santiago! and beware!" cried Alvarado, as, with his sword flashing over his head, he rushed upon his opponent.

"Tecalco, and a woman's wrongs!" cried a voice of thunder, as the heavy form of the copper-cased mask stepped boldly onward to meet the Spaniard, bearing a blade whose lustre at once betrayed that the masked man was Malmiztic.

Down came the blue Toledo of the knight towards the Toltec's head; instantly a broad shield of copper threw the blow aside; but, quick as the flash from the storm cloud, the weapon of the Spaniard again descended, and once more, like the rod which bears the lightning off harmless, the shield of Malmiztic caught the blow, and turned the blade aside. And now, the Toltec, bringing his blazing sword through the air, like a line of light, dealt a blow upon the helmet of Alvarado that made the steel casque ring again; and now, swift as the wings of an eagle, right and left, came the strokes upon the Spaniard's head thick and heavy, while his own blows were deftly whirled aside, and a fresh shower would fall with a deafening noise upon his burnished head-piece.

So rapid and severe came the storm of blows, that Alvarado was stunned by the ringing shock, and reeling under their force, sank confused and overpowered.

Upon beholding their captain at the mercy of his enemy, fifty of the Spaniards sprang forward to rescue him, and Malmiztic fell back towards the Aztec lines. Suddenly Alvarado, recovering himself, rose, and shouting to his soldiers, charged upon the foe, who fled precipitately. The Spaniards pressed hard upon them, chasing the whole troop along the causeway, many parts of which were broken up and torn to pieces, and the sluices made thereby, filled with reeds and other light stuff. Alvarado pursued the party until he had almost gained the great market-place, when, sudden as a storm-gust, the enemy whirled about, and a new host, under cover of an ambuscade, burst forth upon the Christians with terrific force.

Utter rout ensued, and Alvarado, overwhelmed with confusion at the suddenness of the shock, found it impossible to issue orders which could be heard in the midst of the wild fray. Finding resistance futile, he fled, followed by such as could escape; but the enemy were hard upon them, and despite the most desperate efforts, many, sinking under the opposition of vast numbers, were overpowered and captured, or fell furiously fighting to extricate themselves from this most terrible ambuscade.

With these captive Christians, the Aztecs, after chasing the foe entirely back to their quarters, marched in triumph to the great temple—and many a noble warrior of Castile paid the death penalty for the rash haste of Alvarado.

When Cortes heard of this disaster, his wrath was unbounded; but, knowing that it was too late to remedy the evil, he relented, after having reprimanded Alvarado, whose quarters he reached with an infinite deal of hardship.

At this time, certain of the Xochimilcas and other allies entered into a treasonable trick with Cortes, by which they were to rob the houses of the Aztecs, and kidnap the women, and especially to capture Tecalco, the beautiful daughter of Montezuma.

When these things were settled, the Xochimilcas came to the Aztecs, and perfidiously persuaded them that they were friends, and under these false pretences moved many days among them. At length, an opportunity offering, the traitors fell suddenly upon the richest furnished palaces, from which Cortes had charged them to bring all the gold and females.

In one of the royal edifices, Tecalco was quietly employed in the midst of her maids, in embroidering a beautiful mantle for Malmiztic, when suddenly a Xochimilca entered and bade her fly at once with him to Guatemozin, at the farther extremity of the city. The princess, without hesitation, instantly rushed after the stranger, when suddenly in the palace court without, a crowd of the treacherous party seized upon her, and bore her swiftly away towards the camp of Cortes; but in their flight they were met by Guatemozin, who having heard of their perfidy, hastened to punish the deceitful knaves. Sharply he fell upon them, laden as they were with their booty, and bearing off the beautiful daughters of the noblest Mexicans, and in a brief space their ill-gotten gold strewed the streets, and man after man fell, pierced by the Aztec lances, until a line of corpses lay stretched along the highway, almost to the Christian camp. Still the fugitives fell, and Guatemozin pursued. The few who remained, among whom was the one who bore Tecalco, were becoming exhausted from their flight, when a party of cavaliers came galloping forth, headed by Cortes, who seeing the fair prize, snatched her from her captor, and wheeling his steed towards the camp, spurred back at speed, and called upon his cavaliers to return. The horsemen followed their leader, and the traitorous Xochimilca was left helpless. He turned his head and beheld that all his companions bit the dust behind him, while the terrible Aztecs were coming upon him with frightful rapidity. In vain he called upon the Christians; his screams were unheard; he shouted, but they were deaf, and nearer every moment came the rushing sound of the Aztec feet, until turning his face again towards his pursuers, a lance pierced him between the shoulders, and he fell. In an instant a hundred weapons bristled over him, and he was a mangled and lifeless mass of clay. But Cortes upon his steed, with his prize and companions, reached their quarters in safety.

Although Guatemozin had visited so fearful a retribution upon the Xochimileas, that not one of them escaped, yet the loss of Tecalco overbalanced all the satisfaction of having punished the perfidy of the traitors.

When this news was borne to Malmiztic, his usual strength failed him. Heart-sickness came upon him, and then a burning

fever. His faithful dwarf, who had become an inmate of Guatemozin's palace, procured Malmiztic's black boat, and mooring her under the window, in the canal, hard by the place where his master lay, he persuaded the Toltec to enter the boat, and the latter, wild from fever, followed the will of the dwarf.

The moon was in the sky, smiling at her image in the quiet lake, and the keen bow cleft the blue water. The prow touched the farther shore, and the fair dwarf leads his master, like a blind man, to his beautiful grotto upon the hill of Tezcozinco. Hard by, Malmiztic has a palace, a proud pile, but in the cool recesses of his favorite cavern, the loving dwarf smooths the pillow under the head of the Toltec, which burns with a raging, fiery fever.

Twenty suns shine morn after morn over the eastern mountain, but twenty days of darkness and delirium have clouded up the mind of Malmiztic. Night and day are alike black; the gloom of chaos shrouds everything; the dark waters of Lethe flood the soul, and not one faint ray of reason's light beams on the black void.

Malmiztic lies in the cave, but for twenty days, Cortes and his captains storm the city. Dim clouds of smoke envelope the capital. Mighty walls come thundering down, with a cloud of dust, and the roar of warfare begins with the dawn and dies with the day.

It is now settled, that a general assault shall be made on all sides of the metropolis simultaneously, and that the whole Spanish forces and allies must be united. They move forward towards the centre of the city—Sandoval, Alvárado and Cortes, each upon their different quarters of the town. Moving onward, they demolish houses of every character before them, and in their rear lie heaps of smoking ruins, and walls blackened with powder and blood. As they advanced, the horn of Guatemozin was heard from the temple, and even the thousands of priests came pouring forth to meet the mighty enemy. At the sound of that fearful horn, host upon host appeared, as if rising from the very earth. Upon each of the captains streamed out a torrent of Aztec warriors, and the conflict was fierce in every direction.

Cortes was never more active; he headed his cavaliers, and

forced his way down the principal street. Upon either hand rose the stately palaces, looming up in architectural beauty, but battered and broken by the repeated storming of the foe. From the terraces and parapets the Mexicans, as usual, rained their missiles upon the Christians and their comrades, while in the great streets before the stout Spaniard, the mottled myriads of Mexico, with their many-colored banners, crowded on to meet him, with sounding horns and shells, deafening drums and shouts which shook the very air.

Guatemozin led the van, and with his clarion voice he cried, "Aztecs! strike for your honor and your home!"

Up from the Christian ranks rang the counter-cry,

"God and St. James!" and instantly the combatants clashed their weapons in close conflict. Right into each other's ranks they rushed, and in a moment the golden eagle standard of Tenochtitlan fluttered side by side with the gorgeous banner of the cross.

"Now Christians!" shouted Cortes, "for the glory of old Castile!" and at that cry a tenfold vigor seemed to fill each knightly arm, and the commander, like the embodied spirit of chivalry, bestriding a powerful steed, waved his bright sword in the sun, and dashed at the dusky host. Momentarily the living wave rolled back before the Christian steel, but fought as they retreated. Suddenly they halted near the great temple, and maintained their ground firmly. At this moment an unearthly yell was heard from the top of the temple, and Cortes and his companions were struck dumb with horror to behold, upon the height above, the ghastly heads and trunks of their fellow-Christians, exhibited, white and terrible, before their eyes.

The stoutest of the veterans shuddered and sickened at the sight.

"Behold, Sandoval!" shrieked the high priest, and an audible groan arose from the Spanish ranks.

"Behold Alvarado's head!" again shouted the priest, and a loud voice of wailing burst from the lips of every cavalier.

"On, Aztecs, on!" cried the clear, clarion throated Guatemozin. And like a loosened avalanche upon the steep side of Popocatepetl, the whole mass of the countless Mexicans dashed

upon the Christians and their dusky confederates, and swept them back as the mountain-torrent sweeps away the loose leaves of the forest. Up rose a shout of triumph from the red ranks, and the overwhelmed Christians recoiled with haste and dismay, while their associates, the Tlascalans, and other natives, fled howling with terror from the tremendous charge of Guatemozin, and his fiery host, who slaughtered them with fearful carnage, as they fled.

In vain the Christians turned, time and again, to stay the tide of destruction, but the storm of missiles flew in their faces, almost blinding them in a moment, and they were forced swiftly away before the resistless legions, who came flying upon them in dark masses of thousands, with cries and shouts, which raised a din of dreadful and unearthly sounds.

The bright banners of the allies of Cortes, and their hundreds of ensigns, were strewn and scattered among the dead and wounded, who strewed the whole earth for squares.

It was a frightful scene to see the ferocious priests, who had poured forth from the temple by thousands, rush, with wild hair matted with blood and streaming down their backs, hotly upon the main body of the foe, fierce and hungry for blood.

At length the allies made precipitate flight, without a show of resistance, and the Christians were left to stand the terrific storm, which seemed to grow more and more disastrous.

At this dreadful crisis, Cortes, finding opposition futile, gave orders for a hasty retreat. Accordingly they fled in disorder, until they came to the canal in the causeway, which had been filled up with reeds and wood which had floated away. Thousands rushed into the water and gained the opposite bank, while hundreds were cut down by the foe who pressed behind, and many sunk in the water from the mass who crowded upon them.

The Christians fell back from the enemy, but Cortes was the last to retire ; he, upon his steed, struck right and left with his sharp sword upon the heads of the mad Aztecs, who, knowing him, clung to his legs and his saddle-skirts, and made the most strenuous efforts to drag him from his seat.

Hundreds of black heads swarmed around him ; countless hands stretched forth to seize him, while blows rang incessantly, from spears and maquahuitls, upon his coat of mail. At length a giant Aztec struck down his gallant horse, who fell with his noble rider upon the verge of the sluice in the causeway. Cortes quickly disengaged himself, for he beheld the same powerful Aztec, with a Spanish sword in his hand, rushing upon him. Instantly Cortes leaped into the water with a tremendous bound, but the fierce foe, like a tiger, sprang after him, and seized the weaponless Cortes (whose helmet was broken off by the fall) with his left hand. He drew back the right arm to its full sweep to cleave with his sword the very skull of the Christian in twain, when down came upon the outstretched arm a lightning blow from a trusty blade, which severed the giant's arm like a clipped water-flag ! It was young Francisco de Olea, who had worked his way through the water to his general's aid ; but scarce had he wrought his commander's deliverance, when a dozen fierce Aztecs set upon him, and in spite of stout and desperate defence, the young hero, overpowered, sank in the stream pierced by a dozen lances !

But Cortes had scarce reached the other shore, when an Aztec seized him, and was bearing him off to the boats ; but a daring cavalier darted back to his aid, and with a well-aimed blow of his spear struck the foeman a fatal blow in the throat, and laid him upon the earth a corse !

At this instant, a horse arrived, which Cortes with difficulty mounted (as he was wounded in the leg), and fled to his companions. In their retreat to the camp, heads of Christians were thrown out before them into the highway ! at which horrible sight their blood ran cold, and the appalling vision shook them like an ague even when they had reached quarters of safety.

And thus perished, in a single day, sixty tried veterans of old Castile, and a full thousand of their allies !

The discomfited Cortes, shortly after, retired to the main-land with his troops, while a grand illumination and display of bonfires blazed for eight days in the great city, in honor of the

triumphant victory ; and despite the efforts of Guatemozin, the high priest and his associates made a horrible sacrifice of the unfortunate captives who fell into their hands, and the populace paraded through the streets of the capital with wild martial music and songs of exultation for many days together.

Thus, even in the midst of misfortune, does one brilliant stroke of success give greater joy than countless victories, even as a gleam of sunshine through a stormy sky seems brighter than a cloudless noon.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALTHOUGH baffled by reverses, Cortes did not give up the hope of conquest; like a new Sisyphus rolling the stone up the mountain, he quailed not, though it recoiled upon him ever as he reached the summit—for restless ambition spurred him on, and, above all, the glittering vision of gold floated before his mind, a splendid pageant of gilded magnificence—yet were the unsunned and untold treasures of the new land of the west to open upon him in all their gorgeous sheen—yet did he hope to dazzle the eyes of European kings with wealth which would make princes seem paupers. Before him stood the dark towers of Mexico, gloomy and blackened from his protracted storm, and deep in their hidden vaults his eye could see the precious masses, gleaming in their shadowed lustre, and daring him to snatch them from their sable security.

Additional power now added vigor to his purpose; one Rangel arrived from Villa Rica, with soldiers, ordnance, and stores, and especially powder, of which the Christian camp had run short; and with this assistance, the credulous soldiery could see the helping hand of heaven grasping the standard of the Cross, and pointing to the proud palaces of the heathen city, and every heart yearned to return to the olive-clad vales of Spain, and tell how they had stormed and thundered upon the vast pagan metropolis, and planted the blazing banner of old Castile upon the highest turret of the Aztec towers.

They had thrown their toils around the foe, and enclosed him like a caged lion, and day by day hunger gnawed upon him, for they had long since cut off all supplies, destroyed the aqueduct, and guarded the whole lake, that neither water nor provision could come from the main-land.

The famishing Aztecs dragged their nets through the waters

of the briny lake for fish ; they pulled the slimy weeds from the shore and devoured them ; and like a cloud of starving locusts, they fell upon every green plant upon the land which might be eaten.

The wise Guatemozin sank wells in all parts of the city, and although water was found, it was brackish and bitter, and those who partook of it were taken sick, for it did but poorly supply the stead of the pure fountains of Chapoltepec.

Week rolled by after week, and gaunt starvation, with his glassy eyes, began to gaze in at the windows of cottage and palace. The rich and the noble, by the command of the emperor, opened their granaries and storehouses, but the famished multitude swallowed up the stores in a brief space of time.

And now a new horror raised its hydra heads all over the city. Pestilence, frightful as the plague, burst forth in every quarter among the famishing wretches, whom hunger had weakened, and despair rendered hopeless.

Again Cortes sent to Guatemozin to bid the city capitulate, but the firm and patriotic emperor returned him answer, that sooner would he see his subjects corses than slaves, and once more the indomitable Christian led his men and allies against the capital, and began to tear down all the houses, and fill up all the canals in the causeways level, with stones, while bands of his troops, with pickaxes, demolished the walls, and with brands and torches fired every building before them ; while with the same work of ruin, Sandoval and Alvarado urged their way towards the centre of the city.

Clouds of black smoke enveloped the city all day, and by night the crimson glow of a thousand flames glared over the tops of the towers which lay in the pathway of the besiegers.

High upon a temple in the heart of the city, stood Hernando Cortes, his soul elate with success, for beneath him were his own men, battering to the level earth the beautiful palaces which had been the pride and strength of the Aztecs ; and far in the distance he could behold Sandoval and Alvarado, from whom he had been so long separated, coming on with their deadly work of demolition, like two angels of destruction, with fierce and terrible progress. And hard by, in a broad street, he beheld a legion of the

starving troops of Mexico coming down to attack his men. He instantly ordered a soldier, who stood with him on the temple's top, to descend, and command the chief body of his troops to secrete themselves in the deserted houses at hand. His orders were executed forthwith, and at length, as the Aztecs approached, they espied and recognised, high upon the temple's top, the knightly figure of the terrible man, who had scourged them so fearfully. At this sight the hungry legions broke forth in a wild yell, and furiously dashed at the Christians and allies who occupied the street. The charge was a bold and desperate one, and the Christians were carried back by its violence, as sea-birds by a tempest. Faster and faster they retreated, until it seemed they were upon the eve of disordered flight. And swift and confident came the Aztecs, flushed with success, and hot for revenge; but as they passed on pursuing, the loud, clear voice of Cortes could be heard from his height, and like a pent-up hurricane, a throng of Christians rushed forth from their ambuscade, behind the Mexicans, and poured upon them the torrent of their fire from muskets and cross-bows, while with sword and spear they charged upon the astonished and dismayed Aztecs. Hither and thither flew the dusky warriors, and thick they fell, before the impetuous force of their foe.

Loudly and constantly did the excited Cortes, from his airy station, shout to and cheer his victorious troops, moving along the parapet, and clapping his hands wildly, as the resistless might of Castilian arms scattered and crushed the red swarm of his opponents.

All resistance ceased upon the Mexican side, and indiscriminate flight followed; while the Spaniards remained masters of the bloody street, with scarce a handful of slain among their party.

And now, for long days and nights, the voice of wailing was heard throughout Tenochtitlan; swarms of hungered and half-naked creatures crowded around the great temple, and besought the priests to pray for them to their gods, and to Guatemozin.

Another embassy came from Cortes, but the emperor answered resolutely, that so long as a Spanish foot was upon the pavements of Mexico, the banner of the golden eagle should not come down from her towers. Forthwith the beleaguering host renewed the

storm, and the work of wreck and ruin was recommenced. And now, hollow-eyed famine and decaying pestilence, hand in hand, stalked day and night through the wasted city.

At last, the whole myriad of Mexicans rose as one man, and came to the palace portal where the heroic and unyielding Guatemozin dwelt. Thousands of meagre wretches, with sick starvation in their pallid faces, besought and prayed the emperor to surrender the city and save their lives; women and children, on their knees, knelt in the street, and clasping their emaciated hands, with tearful eyes and trembling voices, supplicated the emperor to capitulate.

Guatemozin beheld them, and wept likewise, but he bade his royal officers to order them to retire. The officers came forth and spoke to the multitude, but the populace would not listen to them, but cried:

“Let us see the king!”

Guatemozin came out upon the palace portal, and a groan of joy and sorrow burst from their lips, which pierced the heart of the patriot prince.

“Aztecs, brethren, friends!” he began, “your voices have called me forth, and I must answer. I gaze upon every face in your host and it is pale—I grieve to see it, but it is not Guatemozin who has wronged you—it is the stranger who has brought woe into our midst. We have suffered and do suffer daily—death and disease are among us; thousands sicken with every sun that sets; men beg for bread, and parched lips pray for water. But why? Because we hold out for our homes! because we have chosen rather the death of noble freemen, than the chains of craven slaves! If there is a man in your midst who says that Guatemozin should have given his mother, his sister, his father, or his city to the foe, I blush for such a man. If I am wrong in fighting for your rights, that error let me bear; and may I have no prouder epitaph upon my grave than ‘Here lies Guatemozin, who, dying, said, I will not yield our city to a foe, till death pluck from my skeleton hand the sceptre of her freedom.’ Men of Mexico, you know my will—you have my answer.”

The mighty multitude stood mute, and hung their heads. At

this moment, Tecuiclipa appeared at the doorway, her noble face sorrow stricken at the piteous spectacle.

"Liege lady," cried an old nobleman, "we pray you, speak for us."

"Ay," echoed a thousand voices, "the gods bless you, great queen ! but one word for our wretched wives and babes !"

The high heart of Tecuiclipa, which had thus long held out sternly, melted at this appeal, and, sinking on her knees, suffused in tears, she seized the hand of the emperor, and with a tremulous voice exclaimed :

"Guatemozin, they starve !"

The large dark eyes of the handsome monarch were flooded, and they overflowed.

"Men of Mexico," said he, mournfully, "follow your own course, and not mine !"

And with these words, he lifted his queen from her knees, and throwing his arm about her, entered the palace.

The morrow was appointed for Guatemozin to meet Cortes, and great joy pervaded the Christian camp, for the forces under Alvarado and Sandoval had swept through the city, and joined with those of the general ; and glad was the greeting of those who had been separated during the protracted storm and siege—but many an old familiar face was missing, and many a hardy soldier bore the marks of desperate warfare. But hardships and wounds were forgotten in the gratulation of the troops, and long in the night were the merry sounds of happy voices heard in the Christian camp, and many a cup of the wine of the Aloe was quaffed in that company of rough, bold Spanish soldiers, who afterwards slept quiet and happy in a city where famine and death banqueted on Aztec hecatombs.

The morrow came, yet Guatemozin came not, but in his stead the emperor deputed five nobles, who expressed to Cortes the determination of their monarch not to surrender. The fiery Spaniard, incensed at the unwonted resolve of Guatemozin, dismissed the nobles, and bade the Aztec people prepare for death.

Frightful now was the scene in the great city ; ruins lay scattered far and wide ; marks of fire and blackened wreck were upon every hand, and in every house were the ghastly evidences of

famine, disease and death, while the clamor of the almost naked multitude, as they wandered in every direction, crying for water and for bread, was heart-rending.

Many, mad with hunger, gnawed the bark of trees, and preyed upon the very worms of the earth! Snails upon the lake shores were caught and devoured with avidity, and hundreds from choking thirst, drinking the briny waters, were seized with fatal maladies, and died. Frantic mothers ran screaming through the streets with their children, and threw them headlong in the lake, and then leaped after them and were drowned! Fathers, mad with hunger, snatched bread from the hands of their famishing offspring! and thousands of poor burst into the cellars and stores of the rich and noble, to seek an ear of corn or cup of wine.

A moving mass of thousands came to Guatemozin, and again supplicated him to surrender.

"Go!" cried he, "take all the grain and water of my household, and leave not an ear or drop of either; sweep my granaries, and make my cisterns as dry as a sandy desert. Take everything that Guatemozin has, but ask him not to yield!"

The multitude turned away hopeless, and large bodies yielded themselves up to the conqueror and his Christians, for they were frantic with famine and thirst.

It was night. In the quarters of Cortes sat a company which consisted of the Spanish general, Marina, the Indian woman, the princess Tecalco, Alvarado and Sandoval.

"What is this offer which I learn is made for the ransom of this fair lady?" questioned Cortes.

"I hear," replied Sandoval, "that there is one who offers to fill thy helmet thrice with gold to redeem her."

"Nay," hastily answered Alvarado, "she must not be given up at any price—she is the pearl of the realm, without price and without purchase."

"Not so fast," answered Cortes, "I must determine that matter myself. I am the commander here; but more than that, I am her captor, and it is but fair that I should fix the value upon my own prize."

"Name the sum," returned Alvarado, quickly, "and I will answer it, though it should drain the last ducat from my purse."

"Thou hast just said," replied Cortes, "that she is beyond price."

"Ay," Alvarado replied, "to the purchase of a heathen, but to the bid of a free Christian knight, she should be fairly rated."

"Who is it that makes this offer?" inquired the general.

"His name," replied Sandoval, "I have ascertained, is Malmiztic."

Tecalco started, and her bright eyes beamed in lustrous beauty.

"I see," said Cortes to her, "that you know this man. Is it so?"

"It is," she answered.

"And hath he the means to pay," said the other, "this casque thrice filled with gold?"

"Truly," replied the princess, instantly, "and he will cover it with gems—jewels as fair as stars, and pure as dew—diamonds and emeralds, whose brilliant glow far outshines our royal treasury."

"Then the man is rich?" said the conqueror, and his eyes grew sparkling with eagerness.

"Ay," replied Tecalco, "his means are great, as his bounty is large."

"How then," answered the other, "if I should demand this casque to be thrice filled with gems as well as gold?"

"He will give it gladly," replied Tecalco.

"But, beautiful lady," said the general, while courtesy struggled hard with avarice in his countenance, "thou must not deem that I would make a sale of thee."

"Good! noble general," interrupted Sandoval, "thou sayest well; it is not fair to sell her like a common slave."

"Nay, truly," returned Cortes, and his eye gleamed with the thought of gold, "but if I give her to her will, and she return without a ransom paid, the pagans will say that I have not held her in a worthy light, nor shown her that regard comporting with the daughter of so great a king. Go thou, Sandoval, and make announcement, that if this heathen will bring to this, our Christian camp, gold and gems to fill my casque thrice, with each, the princess shall be free."

Sandoval rose and departed, but Cortes, calling after him,

followed the cavalier without the door, and whispered in his ear, as he grasped his arm, "Let the sum be told thrice, and further, demand as many golden ingots as a man can bear, and of gems a like amount. Hold out this price, that not one pound less than the maiden's weight in yellow ore shall win for her redemption. And be not coy in this demand, for this most mystical of all this godless race, hath such vast hidden sums untold, that if we can get it in our hands, we shall be able to endow a monastery, and thereby give our names to posterity and heaven. Think well, Sandoval, the gold is God's—the claim is for the Cross!"

Sandoval sped away, and Cortes called forth Alvarado, upon whose brow he had seen a terrible cloud gathering.

"Thus, Don Hernando Cortes," began Alvarado, the moment he neared the spot where the general stood, "do you ever treat me, making a plaything of me, and sporting with my poverty—I who should have been laden with gold, but for my faithfully following thy fortunes, cast aside for the few pieces more which the heathen could bring you."

"Why, the maid is the daughter of a king; thou wouldst not make her thy leman," responded Cortes.

"Leman!" echoed Alvarado; "surely not."

"Then, what?" cried Cortes.

"My wife—my better self!" replied the knight.

"Thy wife!" exclaimed Cortes, with amazement, "a pagan, from the very home of idolatry, to wed with a Christian cavalier, a noble knight!—madness, mere madness."

"Pagan, Jew, or Mahommedan," cried the handsome Spaniard, "she is the fairest flower that blushes upon the broad plains of the western world, and could I plant her in my bosom, and bear her to Andalusia, I would be happy though I bore not back with me a ducat."

"Well, enough of this," said Cortes, "I have fixed a course in my mind, and it must be so."

"And I," replied Alvarado, while his face reddened and his eyes blazed, "I have fixed a course in my mind. Hernando Cortes! you and I must part;—my resolve is, with my trusty followers, to leave this place, and meet no more with thee!"

"Nay, nay," cried Cortes, with a smile, "you mistake me; all this is for an end—a world of gold is gained by this, which you shall share; treasures which might be hid forever, are thus brought forth. The girl returns to the home of her infidel forefathers, free, for a time, but a mere day, for in the nature of all earthly things, the frightful famine and pestilence, which have so long scourged the city, must make surrender a close approaching thing—and then, behold! the bird falls in our hands an easy prey—the trap is safe, escape impossible. Now, be not rash, good Alvarado, but wait the morrow, and share the gold—the interest upon the hope deferred is rich. Then cut not your harvest ere the grain be ripe. But no word more to night—sleep—and to-morrow it shall all go well."

The morrow came, and the sun shot his quivering shafts of gold over the dark-doomed city. Before the quarters of the Spanish general, stood Malmiztic, with three Indians upon either hand, laden with gold and gems.

The conqueror rose from a dream of dazzling splendor—a dream of untold riches—and came forth and met the reality. Wedges, masses, and bars of the glittering ore gleamed before him in the hands of Malmiztic's servants. Six vases bore they of the brightest silver, and these were filled with curious works of art, in solid gold, but costlier far for workmanship than ware, engraved and set with gems, enameled with pale pearls, and dotted with diamonds.

And smaller vessels bore they, where chains of rosy rubies, grass-green emeralds, and strings of blue turquoise, curled up in heaps, upon piles of loose gems, whose dyes were delicate and various as the variegated flowers which nodded in the sunshine in the bloom-blushing, musk-scented vale of the crystal Chalco.

Cortes gazed greedily upon the rich treasure, and soon the beautiful princess was brought forth, and the Toltec, with his fair charge, turned towards the palace of Guatemozin, while Cortes gloated over his glittering golden hoard, and set aside the royal fifth for the Spanish emperor, and calling in Alvarado, he made a partial division with him, but kept the mass of the treasure, as he said, for the church.

Thus, selfishness and avarice, like twin poison vines, creeping over a marble statue, clung to, and darkly shaded, the noble character of Cortes ; and this is quietly complained of by one of his tried veterans, who says : "Though he forgot us in the distribution of property, he never failed to call upon us when he wanted our assistance."*

* Bernal Diaz.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TERRIBLE were the last days of the Aztec empire ; conflagration spread her banner of crimson and black to the breeze, and the smoky ruins smouldered for months.

Famine came, and like a vampire, sucked by night the heart's blood of thousands, until the multitude who wandered through the streets seemed like a ghostly band of skeletons.

Tributaries and allies had long since ceased to furnish either food or troops ; and, as the great historical Milton of America says, upon whose mind new lights have flashed, while darkness has closed upon his vision, "The Aztec metropolis saw its great vassals fall off, one after another, as the tree, over which decay is stealing, parts with its leaves at the first blast of the tempest."

It was a siege to which even that of Jerusalem, by Titus, alone could compare.

"In short," says Bernal Diaz, "so unintermitting were our engagements, by day and by night, that during the three months in which we lay before the capital, that to recount them all would but exhaust the reader's patience, and make him fancy he was perusing the incredible feats of a knight-errant of romance."

The mind of every one shrinks back with horror to contemplate the surrendering of the miserable multitudes, and the inhuman cruelty of the allies of Cortes, who butchered full forty thousand men, women, and children ! while the deadly pestilence, and drinking salt water, destroyed as many more.

It was a scene at the sight of which horror's self would have shuddered and sickened, as daily the meagre, famishing wretches rushed into the Christian camp, and begged for bread and water, or death.

Thus, host after host of the dark, hungry legions staggered forward and yielded up themselves, at the moment when almost

ready to faint from famine and weakness, or revolting and loathsome disease.

The mighty metropolis was a foetid sepulchre, a huge and horrible charnel house, whose doors were guarded by the dragon-like Spaniards, so that the living could not escape from the contaminating dead.

The very atmosphere of the city was a baleful vapor, where contagion lurked, and the red sun came forth each morning only to look on a larger body of corpses than darkened the earth the day before.

Guatemozin beheld legion after legion of his people passing over to the enemy, and calling Malmiztic to his palace chamber, he said :

“My friend, this is a piteous spectacle ! Black ruin broods over our city, and Hope, from yon pale peak of Popocatepetl, bends her blue eyes upon this wreck and weeps. I had dreamed that when we struck for our homes, that the gods would have been with us, but our Aztec deities turn pale before the omnipotence of the Christian God ; and, as thou didst foretell, Malmiztic, the blood of sacrificed captives is poured back upon the heads of our people, and the ghosts of murdered thousands cry from the hollow earth for retribution and revenge !”

“Ay, Guatemozin,” said the Toltec, “I told it to Montezuma, and he heeded it not ; I urged the brave Cuitlahua to desist, but he was deaf, and sacrifice progressed. Fate pierced their hearts with her poison arrow, and they then felt in death, that my words were true. I thundered it in anathemas against the bloody priests, but they howled at me and scowled defiance to my threats. I warned the people, but they believed me not ; and now, behold, the fearful hour hath arrived when a ring of fire circles them about, and there is no escape, and they must perish ! for nature’s God has cried for justice, and the blue throne of heaven would fall sooner than that demand should pass unsatisfied.”

“But, Malmiztic,” replied the emperor, “though all be lost, yet must we make the latest hour a sad one to the foe. It must not be said that we faltered in our purpose, even though grim

death grins in our faces at every footstep. Let the last sigh that tells the world we perish, be blent with the cry of 'Mexico, forever!' Earth has now no habitation for us—we are alone—lone as two silent palms of the desert. We may wander where we will, but shall never find a home. If then, we cannot, at least, we can leave our bodies by the green margin of Tezcuco, and die like men!"

"Guatemozin!" answered the Toltec, "my heart is with you; I say one more blow for Mexico! one more stroke for her starving hosts! one holy battle to decide her fate! Within this palace breathes a form, whose soul not all the Christians, nor the unknown powers of the earth or darkness could injure, but for her body's safety, this blade, which so oft hath laid the invaders low, shall now redress her wrongs, and aid to rescue her, or else the last lamp that burns of all the Toltec race, must meet the hurricane and be puffed out, and darkness close upon its golden gleam forever!"

"Ay! and the great gods!" exclaimed Guatemozin, "that terrible thought, my wife, and babes! my wife! my Tecuiclipa!—who will shield thee, lily of my soul!—how will thy fair head bend in this storm? To whom wilt thou and thy infants cling, and cry for mercy? To Christian fiends?—the gods forbid! Sooner would I see thy dark hair stained with the red drops from thy bleeding heart—thy little babes white corpses at my feet, than thou shouldst pray for favor to the heartless wolves that hunt ye down! No, dear wife, and harmless innocents! Let Tenochtitlan sink upon her site—let her dark towers go down in the blue waves of Tezcuco—let fire, famine, and the Christian horde rush over thy blasted and desolate wreck—let pestilence leave not a living ghost to stalk amid her lonely ruins—yes! perish all! and let the Aztec empire be an empty name, echoing through the hollow halls of history, ere we must cringe to kiss the Christian's feet! Malmiztic! friend! to-morrow's sun must seal our fate. Forgive these unmanly tears; but if I should fall, as it is most like I shall, may I not beg that you will guard my little flock, and save them with yourself. For thee, I know, no Christian host or devilish enginery can harm. Some mighty angel guards thee

with his wing. Then pray you, supplicate his strong protection for my weak babes, and may be, widowed wife !”

“Enough,” replied the Toltec, “if I can aid them, thy dark-haired wife shall suffer no distress, and not a curl upon thy prattlers’ heads shall be disturbed. The morrow settles all, Guatemozin ! the morrow !”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was the eleventh day of August, in the year fifteen hundred and twenty-one. Three and ninety days had the Christians beleaguered the stately Athens of the occident—and now, the last stern remnant of the Aztec tribe were gathered, under their monarch, hard by the home of his forefathers, while the hostile Christians, high with hope, and proud in conscious might from former victories, could almost smile to behold the lean, famine-stricken faces and attenuated forms of Mexico's last protectors.

No longer among the Aztec troops could be seen the gorgeous banners blazing with all the colors of the rainbow; nor were the warriors decked in the rich surcoats of splendidly-stained feathers, which formerly gave so brilliant an appearance to the Aztec army when upon the field. The garments of the greater part of them were soiled and torn—a beggarly band to look upon—but in the eyes of this wretched multitude could be seen the fierce, wild gleam of desperate resolve, and each countenance, haggard and hopeless, wore the aspect of an unflinching martyr.

Loud brayed the brazen trumpets, and on came the yellow ensign of Castile and the Cross, spotted with the crimson stains of a hundred battles. Strong and tried war-horses, like centaurs, came, shaking their manes and neighing loud and wild, as if they snuffed in the breeze the rage of the coming storm.

Veterans, weather-beaten, brown, and scarred, advanced with a firm and martial tread, while behind them came, with scarce less orderly pace, the Tlascalans, who had followed the conqueror through his night of defeat, and noon of victory, and they were now come to see the last wreck of the men of Mexico, a troop of spectral warriors—a band of ghosts, guarding the once gorgeous home of Montezuma, the gilded throne whose tapestry had fallen

to decay, and whose rich adornments mouldered in the deserted and lonesome palace halls.

Again the Christian trumpets rang with their swelling notes, and the loud drums proclaimed the charge. Down swept the Christians, like an avalanche, and booming, like the thunder which breaks on Orizaba's brow, came the roar of the Christian cannon.

It is morning, and the first black wave of smoke rolls over the blue lake, and the first fierce clash of arms is heard as the combatants rush together.

It is noon—all the pinnacles of the surrounding mountains are wreathed with an ebon crown of clouds, which have risen from the city, where the din of battle is deafening. The stunning sound of conflicting arms, the rush of many footsteps, the voice of wailing and the shout of defiance. The old Spanish watchword and cry of "Santiago and Spain," rose like the thunder of a cataract, and like an echo from a neighboring glen, the shout came back, from the Aztec lines, of "Mexico or Death!"

Hour after hour, the sun, in the clear, blue sky, looks down through the veil of smoke which hangs over the capital, and beholds the desperate, unceasing conflict.

The clang of weapons knows not a momentary cessation—the warrior's arm knows no respite. Rivulets of blood are in the streets;—but what is blood to madmen? Corpses fall across each other, but the living soldier leaps over his dead brother, and strikes in the face of the foe! Gaunt Aztecs, with their cheeks hollow from hunger, wield, with their bony arms, the sharp maquahuitl, and with their brilliant black eyes burning with desperation, spring on, with a startling shriek, and meet death without a faltering step, or shaken nerve.

Grim Christian veterans, with hearts of steel and hands of iron, meet the red hosts in their infuriate course, and check them, as the mountain crag rebuts the lightning's lance.

The evening sun is far down the western sky, and with it sinks the hope of Mexico, and the heart of Guatemozin. Conflict has changed to carnage, and battle to mere bloodshed. The feeble Aztecs stagger at the foe, and tottering back, reel and fall as the

Christians sweep by, and the cruel savage-souled allies rush upon them with murderous ferocity.

Day declines, and the loud voice of discord grows less and less; the mighty hosts surrender by thousands. Men, women and children have yielded up. Behind the conqueror is the black and burning wreck of the once beautiful city; before him, the palace of her line of kings, and the last link of that line at the head of a handful of faithful followers, fighting and falling back, step by step, before the steady and terrible assault of the Christian Cortes and his fiery legions.

Guatemozin had receded until he came to his own princely palace. In the rear of it lay the lake, upon whose surface the lengthened shadow of the mighty pile rested, dark and gloomily, and the deep waters that washed the massive walls at the base, scarce moved in their quiet bed.

"Here, Malmiztic," said Guatemozin, as he reached one of the inner rooms, "lies the treasure which yon fierce Spaniard seeks; here is the glittering sun of gold, which has long shone upon the throne of the Aztec kings. I would not have it fall in Christian hands. Our nation's last hour has come, and let this, her golden, emblematic sun, sink in the blue depths of Tezcucó, as yon bright day-god sinks in the azure sea of heaven."

"Ay," said the Toltec, "let all this hoard of imperial wealth lie in the dark depths of the lake."

Forthwith Guatemozin ordered the huge sun of gold to be heaved from the palace window into the quiet waters. The ponderous mass fell through the air like a falling star, and the ruffled waters grew glassy where it sank. Heaps of treasure followed it, until the whole was gone.

"Now," cried Guatemozin, "once more for the foe; one more blow for yon golden eagle which blazes upon the banner of Mexico!"

"Nay," cried Malmiztic, "it is vain. This day is lost—the boldest opposition were desperate folly. Close under the palace walls boats lie in wait. I have thy wife and babes prepared; Tecalco, too, is ready now to fly. My own black boat shall bear her hence, and six stout oarsmen I now hold at command to save thyself and thine—come away."

"Nay," answered Guatemozin, "not yet."

"Not yet!" echoed the Toltec, "why, look you! the whole of the streets swarm with Spaniards—Tlascalans, like troops of howling wolves, thicken in dark masses, and move forward without opposition; for not an Aztec is to be seen but in the wildest flight."

"Nay, but one last blow!" said Guatemozin.

"Folly!" exclaimed the Toltec, "a moment wasted jeopardizes life."

"Well, then, away! and I will follow thee," replied the emperor.

The Toltec flew to the part of the palace where the wife of Guatemozin stood, trembling, with her babes, and Tecalco, like a frightened fawn, beholding Malmiztic, flew to his arms, and cried, "Save us, for heaven's sake!"

"Guatemozin!" cried Tecuiclipa, "where is he? Malmiztic, where is he?"

"Without," replied the Toltec; "come, lose not an instant; we must to the boats, and away!"

"But Guatemozin!" cried Tecuiclipa, "I move not without him; rather die here, with my little ones, than leave my lord behind!"

"Yes! back, Malmiztic!" cried Tecalco, pointing to the part of the palace where the shouts of the Christians could be heard, as they advanced.

"Fly to him! for the sake of our God! Malmiztic, by thy hope of heaven, rescue him!"

"I will, Tecalco," said the Toltec, "or thou shalt never see Malmiztic's face again!"

"Nay! come back, come back!—thou canst not save him—they will overwhelm thee with their host," exclaimed Tecalco.

But her voice was unheard—the Toltec was gone—he rushed through the great halls of the palace and reached the front portal. In the street and court-yard a confused mass of soldiers were rushing towards the broad marble steps, which led up into the magnificent pile; and casting his eager eyes over the multitude, he beheld the towering form of the Aztec emperor, sheathed, like himself, in a suit of copper mail. Upon him a furious throng

were crowding, while right and left, before and behind, Guatemozin swept a blade of Toledo, which had fallen into Aztec hands on the fearful Noche Triste. Still, as he fought, the crowd pressed upon him, until they had forced him back against the wall. A shout was heard, of "Alvarado, and victory !" as the handsome cavalier urged his way through the mass towards the spot where Guatemozin stood at bay. "Santiago !" shouted the proud Spaniard, and his blue sword rang on the copper casing of Guatemozin's body. No sooner had the Spaniard struck, than the emperor dealt a sweep with all the energy of his over-labored arm—down came the blade upon the Spaniard's casque, and down dropped Alvarado, as if thunder smitten. But a fierce Spanish soldier, seeing the cavalier fall, rushed with a heavy lance and a terrific look to despatch the desperate emperor. The sharp-pointed, glittering steel was at his breast, and the emperor, attacked on all sides, shrank close to the wall and crouched towards the earth. The Spaniard was just upon the eve of driving his terrible spear to the Aztec's heart, when a blow, swift as thought, struck the lance in twain, and the powerful Toltec, rushing forward, dealt another stroke at the Spaniard, who instantly rolled in the dizziness of death upon the blood-spotted ground !

In a moment, Malmiztic stood side by side with the emperor against the wall. Guatemozin's countenance, which had been dark with despair, now lighted up with a wild look of enthusiasm, and shaking his sword in the air, exclaimed :

"Ye gods of my fathers and of Mexico ! now I can die content !"

"Madness !" thundered Malmiztic, "thy wits are wild ; see you not that we are surrounded ?—legions are upon you—and escape almost hopeless."

"Then here let us die, and die gloriously !" exclaimed Guatemozin, with an enthusiastic frenzy.

"Thy mind is turned," said the Toltec ; "hear reason for an instant."

"Nay, let us die under the golden wings of the Aztec eagle—such a death were a triumph, and a glory fit for a god !"

"Fool" said the Toltec, furiously seizing Guatemozin with

one arm and lifting him off the ground ; "think of thy wife and babes !"

The Toltec strode along with his burthen next to the palace wall, bearing him like a child, while with his right arm he swept his sword in swift circles, catching the countless weapons which flashed before them, and whirling them away with magical rapidity.

"Ay," cried Guatemozin, as if suddenly awakening from a dream, "my wife ! my babes ! Let me free, Malmiztic, I will fly !"

The Toltec dropped the emperor on the palace steps ; instantly he darted in, and Malmiztic followed, closing a massive door and barring it. Almost instantaneously the crowd of conquerors thundered at the barrier, and essayed in vain to break the copper-riveted panels to fragments.

"Haste ! haste !" cried Malmiztic, to the Aztecs in the rear of the palace, who gathered their paddles, and began plying with might and main.

"A fortune to every man who sets foot, with Guatemozin, on the farther shore of the lake ! Fly, Aztecs, fly ! You bear your monarch and his household gods !—strike strong, for every stroke is for Mexico ! Ply, brave lads, ply !

The barge darted from the palace side, like a dolphin through the deep.

Still the Spaniards thundered at the barrier.

"Now, Tecalco !" said the Toltec, lifting her light form by the waist with one arm, and placing her in his black, bright-belted boat ; "now, God guard us on our way !" and instantly Malmiztic struck the water with his quivering oar, and the magic craft cleft the liquid mirror whereon the last crimson gleams of the setting sun rested.

In the meantime, Cortes had reached the palace, which the few desperate Aztecs within were defending ; the conqueror burst in.

"Where," cried he, to a poor, starving wretch of an Indian, "is the treasure room ?"

The wretched creature led the way, but reeled, as he walked, from weakness.

"Here," said he, opening a door where a few loose gems and pieces of gold were scattered on the floor.

"This !" cried the conqueror, with rage and astonishment,

"this the treasury!—lying and deceitful knave, where lies Guatemozin's gold?"

"There is his all!" the Aztec replied.

"What!" shouted Cortes, furiously, "dost thou tamper with me, thou Pagan liar!—this! on thy head, for thy presumption, thou double-dealing, serpent-tongued heathen!" and with these words, the enraged Spaniard struck the weak Aztec dead upon the marble floor, and dashed into apartment after apartment of the mighty edifice in search of the huge hoard of gold which his eyes of avarice had pictured there.

From room to room he rushed, penetrating every part of the palace, from darkest vaults to the flat and open roof, and reaching at length the terrace, breathless with exertion, his face wan and blank with disappointment, he sank down upon the stone wall, and gazed upon the universal wreck below, where the once splendid city reared her thousand magnificent towers aloft, forming a scene more gorgeous than the palaces of the genii in an enchanter's vision.

But now, behold, a vast outspread map of chaotic ruin, crumbled and scattered in huge unsightly masses! Bare, black, burnt walls, through which the last red rays of the setting sun poured their crimson flood upon piles of ruin heaped upon each other.

Casting his eyes over the lake, he beheld a fleet of Aztec boats urging their way to escape from the city, while the Spanish craft were chasing them in every direction. Midway in the dark sheet of water, whose surface blushed with the reflection of long, flame-colored clouds, he descried two boats whose speed far surpassed all others upon the lake; in one, six oarsmen swept their shining paddles through the yielding element, and drove the keen craft over the deep, like an albatross on wing; and like a rapid swallow, winnowing over the wave, a small, black boat, lightly as a flying shadow, shot past the other, though but a single dark figure plied the enchanted oar. Suddenly, Garcia Holguin, who had chased a flying fleet of Aztecs, perceived a boat coming, and forthwith he bade his crew use every exertion to capture it—but not the swift fish which flew through the lake, could more rapidly dart away than did the dark shell which bore the Toltec and Tecalco. The red flash of muskets gleamed

across the darkening waters, but the spirit-like boat moved on its flying course, until lost in the shadows of the trees on the distant shore. Forthwith Holguin turned back, and met the six stout oarsmen, who plied with speed. A figure rose in the craft, and bade the oarsmen labor for their lives; but vain was the cry, of that tall chief—before him was Holguin, with his well-armed barge; behind him came crews of Spaniards, hastening for their prey. But Holguin saw the figure in the boat, and knew the cry—that voice had more than once startled him in battle. The prize was here—here, the object of the day, the Aztec emperor—Guatemozin himself!

“Yield!” shouted the excited Spaniard—but the rowers yet went on.

“Yield!” repeated Holguin—but every paddle plied.

“Fire!” cried the Spaniard, agitated with anxiety, “but spare the king!”

Through the dusky shadows of the nightfall the crimson gleam was seen, and the report of guns rolled over the water—two of the rowers fell dead!

“Hold!” cried Guatemozin, to his men, “it is past—the Gods are against us!”

Almost instantly Holguin’s crew grappled with the Aztec barge.

* * * * *

The red sun had set in thunder-clouds when Cortes beheld the last of the Aztec kings a captive, on his knees before him, in the midst of his own ruined city.

“Cortes,” said the noble captive monarch, and tears flooded his black eyes, “I have done that which was my duty, in defence of my kingdom and my people; my efforts have failed, and being now brought by force a prisoner in your hands, draw that poniard from thy side, and stab me to the heart; but spare, oh! spare my wife—my wife and harmless babes!”

The stern conqueror smiled; triumph and pity, glory and remorse were in his glance.

“Nay,” said he, kindly, “resolute and proud prince, yon Christian flag which floats from the tower of thy fathers, wars not with women and their babes. Men are its opponents, and

yon Cross is the emblem of clemency, and even with thee, unyielding infidel, we will deal tenderly."

The high-strung nerves of the fair-browed Guatemozin gave way ; the pent-up waters of his soul broke their bounds, and flowed fast and free. He turned his streaming eyes towards the setting sun, but it was gone. Around him the black and deserted tenements and palaces of his people grew darker, as the shades of night deepened. The conqueror led the way to his quarters, and the captive, with his wife and children, followed in his footsteps.

Night wore on, but not a star looked through the dusky curtains of the sky ; no moon, with her yellow lamp, walked through the gloomy halls of heaven. The red blush from the west was gone, and a black bank of storm-clouds rolled in chaotic grandeur from the northern star to the farthest point of the south. Gloomy masses, taller than Popocatepetl piled upon Chimborazo, loomed up out of the distance, and doubled the ebon darkness of the night. The winds were hushed—the tired soldiers were asleep—the dead city lay wrapped in her shroud of sables. But the gloomy conqueror and his heart-broken prisoners were full awake, save the two gentle babes, who alone slept as innocence can sleep, which knows not the ills of earth, and the pale sorrows which touch the lids of slumber and frighten away sweet dreams.

But that fearful night, nature knew no dream in the murky skies. No insect gave its night-cry in the gloomy groves—no melodious mocking-bird poured forth his silver song to his mate and the moon. Silence, on her two great wings, hovered over the city, and held her breath to listen for the wild tempest which was coming through the midnight gloom of the mountains, startling the hooting owl from the hollow trunk of the oak, and frightening the wild raven from his roost on the pinnacle of the towering pine.

That day the earthly empire of the Aztecs had been overthrown, and now the fiends of darkness and destruction had gathered to throw the elements into confusion and discord.

First came the faint breeze, which barely waved the frail grass; then came the gale, which lifted the loose ashes from the black streets and burnt wrecks, and carried it whirling through the air,

like the thick flakes of a snow-storm, filling the whole atmosphere as the sand-clouds in the simoon. Now came the wild whistle of the storm-spirit of the Cordilleras, and his legion of night witches singing in the wind; the sharp, keen breath of the tempest, as its fury arose, lifted every light thing from the earth, and scattered it loose in the air. Anon, like a mighty avalanche, the huge clouds rolled down from the tops of the mountains hard by, and swept resistless through the valley; the level waters of Tezcucó were lifted above the clouds; the foaming billows of the lake rose curling in the air, as white as the pale peak of Orizaba.— And now, like a demon let loose to destroy, the hurricane rushed roaring upon the ruined city; walls, which were grey with centuries of age, fell prostrate in his path; frail cottages were blown to fragments; high, massive walls, hurled down, fell with an earthquake shock, and the very island foundations of the city seemed shaking, as if ready to sink into some awful gulf hollowed out of the deep crater of the world. Every pile shivered on its site, and every instant some giant wreck trembled on its base and tottered to the earth in thundering ruin. And now, the thunder of heaven returned an answer to the deafening roar below, and as the crash of some massive palace was heard, the burst of the cloudy artillery pealed forth a hoarse and overwhelming echo, until the din was more dreadful than the ear of day ever heard.

And not with one voice came the jarring thunder, but one incessant roll shook the earth and the air, while from the inky masses overhead, which was not cloud, but solid night and load-stone blackness, the crimson lava streams of fire-ran red and hissing from the impenetrable gloom above.

Cataracts of blue and quivering lightning leaped down from the mountains of ebon gloom, with a thousand running branches and trembling forks, and glared on the ghastly wreck of the ruined city with a strange, unearthly gleam.

Fire seemed to rain from heaven, as upon a new Sodom and Gomorrah, while the black lake rose to swallow up a second city of the plain.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Thus passed the most terrific tempest that ever shook the tropic region; it fled with the night, and when the morning came the sky was as clear as the pellucid depths of a mountain pool. The yellow sunshine streamed down from heaven, and gilded the valley with its mellow light, and where the thousand spires of Tenochtitlan had glittered, lay one tremendous mass of wreck and ruin.

Thus fell the empire of the Aztecs, whose rapid rise and brilliant existence closed with the most disastrous downfall and complete overthrow, that ever befell a nation of the earth. The vast temple of idolatry, within whose mysterious halls the gods of the Aztecs sat upon their gorgeous thrones of gold, had fallen. The lightning eye of the One omnipotent was turned upon them, and every mystic mockery was hurled from its seat, and in the dust lay broken to fragments, an emblem of its own nothingness. A whisper went forth from heaven, and a thousand thunders pealed through the palaces of the Pagan gods; one universal crash was heard, and all the temples of their terror and glory were gone forever!

Tenochtitlan sank to rise again; the young grass upon her ruins had scarce put forth its emerald blades, before a thousand Aztec slaves, who had been freemen, were busy under a new monarch—a Christian master—and a new city rose out of the wreck.

The reeking feculence, which had made the spot a home for pestilence, was swept away, and health, with her rosy face and balmy breath, hovered over the blue Tezcuco, and fanned the valley with her refreshing wings. Months passed by, but the restless spirit who had usurped this realm, had failed to find the object of his search. The gold which his fancy had discovered in

the distance, turned to brown rocks upon approaching; the fruits of his imagination, like the apples of the Dead Sea, were gilded on the surface, and ashes at the heart.

Disappointed and dissatisfied, he once more gathered his soldiers, seeking in the excitement of commanding an army something to quiet the uneasiness of his troubled soul.

Away for leagues to the south, he moved his hosts, and the captive king whom he had conquered.

Mile upon mile, and day after day, did he wend his way into a land where never before trod the foot of Christian, traversing broad plains, where the lone aloe stood in its beauty, over mountains whose snow-white heads glittered in a tropic sky, and through valleys whose dense, dark wildernesses were studded with giant trunks, so huge that the ancient oaks of Europe would have dwindled into dwarfish saplings by their sides. And often, in penetrating these primeval forests, would he come full upon some olden city, overshadowed by a thousand leafy trees and inextricably tangled vines, seeming like the sylvan sarcophagus of a buried nation of Eld. And here, in the thick and gloomy woods, the Christian hosts would pause to rear, amid the sombre shadows of those southern groves, the rude figure in wood of the Cross of Christ.*

Week after week, the toilsome march went on; roads were cut through the pathless wilds, through tangled thickets, and thorny brakes; rapid and rocky streams were forded, and when the unknown land of Guatemala, far away south, was entered, broad rivers, unnavigated and dangerous, rolled through the land, but checked not the course of the conqueror.

Native tribes, startled by the unheard-of stranger, came forth to bar his way, but were scattered by his band as wild fowl by eagles.

Still farther and farther south he urged his course, hope telling him that the city of gold might yet burst upon his view, through the dark green bowers of that land of eternal summer.

But yet the living phantom of gold glided ever before him, but eluded his grasp. It was an incorporeal shadow of the mind,

* "On our route we made crosses on the living trees, and put inscriptions, saying, 'Here passed Cortes and his army, at such a time.'"—BERNAL DIAZ.

whose gilded figure danced ever in the distance, like the delusive fairies which visit men in dreams. Deceived and maddened by this vision of disappointment, Cortes now daily, as he progressed, urged upon his captive, Guatemozín, to disclose where he had hidden the treasures of the empire. The captive denied that any existed, save what was sunken deep in Tezcucó, but the Christian grown furious, contradicted him, and swore it was a subterfuge, and that the rich mass was still secreted, under the hope that the Aztec might yet have an opportunity of enjoying it.

Each day Cortez pressed him to disclose the hidden spot, but still the king disclaimed all knowledge of a secret store.

Next came cruel threats and menaces, with talk of torture. The proud-hearted Aztec heard the threats with an unshaken soul, and was silent; this, to Cortes, seemed the spirit of defiance, and that spirit he resolved to break. He therefore had the prisoner bound, and his feet placed near a burning fire, and anointed with oil! The heroic and unfortunate emperor winced and writhed under the fiery torment—the hot flames cracked and crisped the living flesh, but the resolute victim faltered not in his firmness.

“Now,” cried Cortes, “will thy pagan spirit yield?”

“Yield!” replied the sufferer, “what have I to relinquish but life?—these glowing embers which burn before me are a living bed of roses, whose natural thorny stings I cannot blame; but thou shalt find these coals, which now blush to behold thy fiendish cruelty, shall yet burn within thy soul—they shall be flowers of fire! and thine own thoughts shall be the fuel upon which they shall feed! Nay, these red roses shall live when this body shall perish, and shall sear thy soul, as they now consume my flesh.*

The conqueror finding his victim failing, commanded the torture to be withheld, and he continued his march with his army.

Daily some unlooked for obstacle intercepted his path, until he came at length to a wide, sluggish river, which checked his whole

*Ce trait est digne de plus beau temps de la Grèce et de Rome. Sous toutes les zones quelle que soit la couleur des hommes, la langue des âmes fortes lorsqu'elles luttent contre malheur, Nous avons vu plus haut quelle fut la fin tragique de cet infortuné Quauhtemotzín.”

troop; upon its marshy margin the main body halted, while a part of the Christians, with auxiliary Indians, undertook to cross the shallow but miry slash which spread out for miles, like a broad lake, forming a complete quagmire, through which the soldiers could scarce draw one foot after another, and in which the horses floundered and fell.

But Cortes ordered the whole army to forthwith commence an immense bridge of logs, to be laid on the surface of the water, and to be fastened one to another until the stream was passed.

The work began and progressed, but numbers daily became sick; for outside of the forest, within whose dense shades they felled the timbers, the hot sun sent down his burning beams, which were so fierce and scorching that the workmen could scarce breathe. And, added to these difficulties, the stock of provisions necessary to provide for so large a body of men was well nigh exhausted, and the troops were forced to feed upon such fruits and wild meats as could be found in that tropical wilderness.

But all these difficulties and perils were surmounted, and Cortes, the conqueror, with his army, passed into the heart of Central America.

The savage cruelty with which he had treated his captive, had roused the ire of the few noble natives who were yet the travelling companions of Guatemozin, and the prisoners of the Spaniard, and they complained bitterly of the unkindness and inhumanity of Cortes, who, hearing these murmurs, became inflamed with the most violent passion, and flying to Guatemozin, red with rage, he bade him prepare to die! for daring to bring treason into the camp—for even veteran Castilians had been loud in their clamors against the course of their commander.

Guatemozin heard the fearful sentence with a calm, unterrified countenance. But Cortes proclaimed that he had overheard and detected a dark plot of treachery, and charged a young noble Aztec, who had accompanied the emperor, with having connived at his escape, and sentenced him to death likewise.

“Would it had been so!” said the noble youth, “would that this hand or head could have set the good, the great, the glorious Guatemozin free!”

"Villain!" exclaimed the angry general, "thou art doomed to death!"

"Spaniard!" replied the youth, "I am happy to die by the side of my sovereign!"

"Then die thou shalt!" returned the other, and forthwith he ordered Guatemozin and the youth forth to where a giant tree stretched out its strong arms.

The whole army stood gazing in gloomy silence, as the prisoners were led to the place of execution; the priest came forward to confess the condemned, but Guatemozin waved the minister away with his hand, and fondly embracing his wife and babes, mounted the fatal stand, with his young and faithful subject.

Cortes gazed sternly upon Guatemozin, and the unwavering Aztec emperor returned the look, with a sad, settled, but undaunted glance.

The old cavaliers beheld the captives, and down the iron-brown cheeks of men inured to sights of woe, the tears of sympathy coursed like crystal beads.

"What hast thou to say?" questioned the conqueror, "ere thou art launched into eternity, and a world prepared for the devil and idolatrous traitors?"

"This only," replied Guatemozin, turning his large black eyes upward towards heaven, "may God demand of you this innocent blood!"

Like an electric flash the deep mellow music of the emperor's trembling voice, spoken from the brink of the grave, pierced the heart of the Christian, and the color fled from his face, but his blanched lips moved, and the fatal order came hollowly from his throat—the dread mandate was uttered, and that glorious figure of strength and beauty dangled and twirled in the air!

One struggle, terrible and convulsive, shook his frame, and that form of symmetry stretched forth its limbs, and was a corse!

Guatemozin was no more, and by his side a noble youth hung lifeless in the air!

A wild shriek was heard, which pierced the ear with horror. A tall, pale woman was seen to throw up her arms towards heaven, and fainting, fell upon the earth.

Hernando Cortes had reached his revenge—his passion

had culminated. The cup of glory which he now quaffed was blood! Men who had followed his footsteps, and almost worshipped him as a demi-god, and flocked about him when green fields grew crimson in battle, now shuddered and shrank from him as a murderer, whose lips of ice could drink the hot blood of an innocent victim. And one of the old war-worn soldiers, when speaking of the scene which they had witnessed, exclaims, "I also declare they suffered death most undeservingly, and so it appeared to us all, amongst whom there was but one opinion upon the subject, that it was a most unjust and cruel sentence."*

Thus perished, in his prime, the noblest monarch of the western world—the purest patriot that ever graced, with valor and virtue, a throne in the land of the setting sun!—one, who blended the heart of a hero with a soul as kind and soft as that of the gentlest woman—whose fair face wore a cheerful and lovely expression—whose large, black eyes lighted a god-like countenance, and whose noble appearance in form, fitted him for the high and active station of command which he occupied.

Success, which makes men great, who failing would have been unknown, did not crown his unparalleled courage and constancy; but the arm of fate fought against him, and he stood supporting the pillar which upheld the falling temple of the Aztec empire—man after man, who had been propping up the kingdom's structure, had fled from the impending ruin, yet not until the fatal crash was heard, did he deign to fly. But it was too late, the temple and throne reeled and fell in fragments—but the wreck buried him not; it was left to the evil heart of Cortes to slay that being whom the God of battles had spared.

And thus, ignobly hung, Guatemozin died—"a character," says the admirable Clavigero, "entitled to a better fate; an example of fidelity most worthy to be recorded, which, had the hero been Grecian or Roman, in place of American, would have been the subject of praise of both historians and poets."

* Bernal Diaz.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I WILL conclude this account by observing, that it appears that the marquis never prospered from the time of his first conquest of New Spain, and his ill fortune is ascribed to the curses with which he was loaded."—BERNAL DIAZ.

FAR in the untraversed wilds of Guatemala, the conqueror continued his march; terrible were the sufferings of his army in that deep wilderness and region of a fiery sun, but far more terrific were the thoughts, the troublous thoughts, that tortured the soul of Hernando Cortes. The retribution for the past pressed heavily upon his mind, and closer than his own shadow the black spirit of remorse haunted him in the sunshine, and in solemn shades of night it sat by his couch, and with its piercing eyes gazed into his very soul.

In his painful dreams the pale ghost of the murdered Guatemozin would come to him with its reproachful countenance, and beckon with its shadowy, skeleton hand for him to follow it, until the soul-stricken dreamer would start up from his couch trembling with horror, while the cold clammy perspiration stood in great drops upon his white brow.

Thus day by day passed on, and he lay upon a soul-rack, perpetually suffering silent agonies unspeakable.

It was night—the army had halted—the camp fires were dying out by which the troops had prepared their scanty meal, and the weary soldiers, worn out with fatigue, lay wrapped in deep sleep, the sweet oblivion of the overtasked body.

In his camp, the conqueror lay upon his rude bed with wakeful eyes, while around him could be heard many snoring heavily; but when he closed his lids to court slumber, fifty Tlascalans lifted their bloody arms, without hands, before him, and passed on in melancholy procession. Then, strange, grinning apes descended

from the trees hard by, and mowed and chattered at him ; huge serpents wrapped their cold coils about his body, and shook their trembling, scarlet tongues close before his eyes ; scaly dragons crawled around him, and, hissing, blew their foul breath in his nostrils and ears ; vampires, with their wings of leather, sealed his mouth, and he suffocated.

With a convulsive bound he sprang to his feet, gasping for air ; forth he rushed into the midnight forest ; the broad, white moon looked down from the deep blue dome of heaven and silvered the sable leaves of the gloomy wood. The night air cooled and refreshed the fevered Cortes, as on he strolled, with burning brow bare, through the pathless depths of the wild wood, with its thousand tangled thickets and vine-wrapped groves.

Heedless whither he wandered, he strayed far from the camp, until before him, lifting its black towers high over the giant oaks, stood a great, gloomy building, which had been a palace or castle, upon whose solid walls the snow-white moonbeams fell, which were here and there checkered by the long, leafy boughs.

The fevered general paused at the portal of the vast old wreck, and gazed in, but all was gloom, save where the long, moveless beams of the moon blanched the black stone of the floor, as it gleamed through the apertures of the lofty walls.

Cortes advanced, but scarce had his foot pressed the solid floor of the great hall within, when, gazing upon him with eyes of fire through the gloom, he beheld the pale face of Guatemozin. Cortes pressed his hand across his eyes and brow, for an instant, and looking up, the phantom of his fancy was gone.

He strode on a few paces more, calmly, when, suddenly upon the mosaic work of the floor before him, fell the dark shadow of a man in a loose robe. The blood of Cortes chilled with horror, as casting his eyes about, he beheld a figure pass outside of one of the open portals of the ruin, and upon the stone pavement a slow-paced tread was heard. Cortes trembled with terror, and turning, fled for safety, but missing his way, and deceived by the moon shining through the wall, he rushed into another part of the huge building, where he was completely lost and bewildered in the immense halls of the ruins, but, hurrying on as if the fiend were at his heels, he missed his footing, and plunged

headlong into a gloomy vault, whose open mouth looked but a single step deep, but proved a gulf, into which Cortes was precipitated, and fell with a groan senseless to the bottom. After a time recovering, he lay moaning with agony in its gloomy depths. Upon a sudden, a form appeared at the edge of the vault above, and said:

“Who moans within?”

“I,” answered the general, “Aztec friend, for I know thee by thy speech—I, Cortes, the Christian commander—aid me, for the love of God, aid me! for my bones are broken, and I am wounded to the death. I will pay thee thy weight in gold, if thou wilt assist me out. Good friend, for God’s sake, leave me not here to die!”

The figure descended by a flight of stone steps, on the opposite side of the vault from that on which the general had fallen, and reaching the bottom, lifted in his arms the form of the Spaniard, whose limbs were sorely bruised but not broken, and bearing him up without a word, the stranger ascended the steps of the vault, and was soon outside of the old ruin, in the pallid blaze of the moon, where he laid Cortes upon a soft bed of grass and flowers.

The general cast his eyes upward, and his face became ghastly, as he exclaimed:

“Thou! thou! Malmiztic! dread being—for the sake of our Saviour, spare me!—for the love of the mother of Christ, do not destroy me! Thou hast brought me forth to torture me! to rack me! to burn! Oh, heavenly angels, guard, and protect me! Oh, dark, dread mortal, spare me! spare me!” and the agonized Christian clasped his hands in supplication, while a look of intense pain and horror glared from his upturned eyes.

“Thou knowest me,” said the Toltec, gravely and calmly; “enough—thou art the gold-seeking stranger that hath wasted this realm; thou art he who can cry to a God for mercy, and murder a nation of harmless men! thou couldst shudder at idolatry and its rites, yet banquet on the blood of a thousand human hearts at a single sacrifice to thy ambition;—and yet thou canst pray!—thou canst call on God to help thee in thy wretchedness, when thou hast been deaf to the myriad voices of woe, whose

cries would have almost made the mossy rocks of this ruin shed tears!—and yet thou canst ask mercy!”

“Yea!” exclaimed Cortes, with agony of body and soul, “do not kill me, I entreat thee! I beg of thee to grant me a few more hours of life! I will give thee all I have—but let me live a brief space longer!”

“Christian!” said the Toltec, distinctly, but sadly, “it is not for me to visit on thy head the penalty for thy multiplied wrongs committed. There is a Power whom you profess to serve, and yet know not, who would chasten thee by sighs and remorse, if thou wert permitted to live. Thou art unfitted to die—the hot blood of harmless men is upon thy hands. Let tears of repentance pour upon them like rain for years, it will scarce remove the stain. Why, then, should I hurry thee, all guilty as thou art, to an untimely grave? No, thou hast wronged those who were most dear to me, yet I forgive it all. The bones of all my race are long since buried, and the noble chief of the people with whom I had linked myself, thou hast destroyed! Grass will soon be growing where the body of Guatemozin lies, and the lone night-flower will be the mourner that will hang its pensive head in darkness and drop tears upon that chieftain’s grave, and the wild mocking-bird will haunt that shady spot when his spirit will be in Paradise!

“One of his race yet lives with faith in a single God, who guards her more safely than could a thousand of the Aztec idols. Enough of this; I will bear thee close to thy camp, but ere we part, I will charge thee one thing;—seek thy way no farther south. Mark well that I warn thee to turn thy course to whence thou camest, for a fatality will follow thee here, which will be death! While thou hast life, pray for forgiveness, ere the dark wing of destiny shall overshadow thee, and close out the light of heaven forever. Therefore mark me, Christian! make thy way towards the star which standeth in the north! By yonder elysian lake of Tayasal, the hand of fate hath drawn across thy way an airy barrier; seek not to pass it. Beyond this point no good can come to thee.”

With these words the powerful Toltec again lifted the Spaniard

in his arms, and bore him through the black forest within call of the Christian camp.

"Here," said Malmiztic, "I leave thee, and this is all the revenge that Malmiztic, the last of the Toltecs, will take of thee; and now, farewell."

"Stay, stay!" exclaimed Cortes, earnestly; "mysterious man, or angel may I call thee; canst thou forgive me? Wilt thou forget the wrongs that my rash acts have done to thee, and those who were thy friends? Malmiztic, I am miserable! my evil deeds recoil and crush me like a mountain; horrors haunt me perpetually, and one word of forgiveness will be a balm to my burning soul!"

"Christian!" replied the other, "the dove-eyed angel of mercy has ever a smile for him who forgives! therefore, I write all memories of thy misdeeds in the air! The wind of oblivion that sweeps silently by, shall bear them off forever—no recollection of them shall linger in my heart; but when the lone Toltec bows his knee to his Maker, that thou wert once his foe shall be forgotten—and even thy weal shall be part of the Toltec's prayer! And now, we part to meet no more on earth; yet, in time to come, beyond the region of yon white-faced moon, we both shall meet Him who made us! There, Spaniard, strive to come with a purer soul, and thou shalt have forgiveness from Him in whom this lone Toltec's faith and hope rest for happiness in eternity!"

Malmiztic fixed his large, black and brilliant eyes upon Cortes, but the Spaniard could not speak—he sat upon the earth weeping like a woman.

The majestic Toltec turned slowly away, and folding his dark and graceful mantle about him, with a calm dignity, moved quietly off through the moonlight, and his form soon faded from sight of the Christian in the solemn shadows of the giant forest trees.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON the morrow, the army of Hernando Cortes were making their way through the wilderness toward Mexico. Before they had started back their eyes had rested upon a proud pile of palaces whose white walls glistened like polished pearl, and were reflected in magic beauty upon the silver surface of the lovely lake Tayasal.

The curious cavaliers would fain have made their way to this Eden island, upon which the snowy palaces lifted themselves aloft in the midst of the magic lake, but Cortes commanded his army to move on towards Tenochtitlan, and the fairy scene faded away.

Oft did the alternate light and shadow of day and night checker the earth, ere that army reached their destined goal. Toilsome leagues were traversed, through changes from low, hot plains, to high and frozen mountains, but the strangest change which those soldiers saw was in Hernando Cortes. One who followed him at that time, thus speaks :

"It made me melancholy to find him so weak and reduced. Distress and disease had worn him down. Indeed, he expected death, and had gotten a Franciscan habit made to be buried in."*

The conqueror reached the capital, and soon he and his followers were prepared to bid adieu, for a time, to New Spain of the Ocean Sea, and return once more to their long-sighed-for homes in Andalusia.

He reached Vera Cruz thin and squalid, but still bearing with him that invincible banner, with its motto, "*Amici, crucem sequamur et in hoc signo vincemus.*"

Within a monastery which he had established at this place, the

* Bernal Diaz.

Spaniard retired to pray, but sackcloth and sorrow removed not the burthen which lay heavily upon his soul.

Far over the blue waters of the almost unknown Atlantic, the general took his course, with his brown-visaged veterans, leaving behind them the land of the aloe and the palm, and with their eyes stretched forward to behold the realm of the olive and the vine.

But why linger to speak of the anxious days spent in ploughing the monotonous ocean? They reached the home of their hearts—the faces of friends were before them, and eagerly around every one of the cavaliers came crowds, curious to hear the tales of the strange lands of the western world.

But sad was the fate of the gallant young Sandoval—the green hills of his native land had scarcely blessed his vision, when the silent messenger of death came, and whispering in his ear, beckoned the spirit of the young soldier to follow to the dim land of dreams.

It was hard to be called away after the stormy days of danger were passed, and the black battle-clouds of the Aztec land cleared up in the sweet sunshine of home;—and where the youthful hero had hoped for honor and renown, he found a narrow bed in a valley where green grass, freckled with flowers, lay like a mantle on his last resting-place.

Who shall tell the high honors which were heaped upon Hernando Cortes? Triumphant success had silenced every enemy. The thunders of Fonseca, the bishop of Burgos, had rolled away and died in the distance. The Emperor Charles entertained him in his palace; the highest nobles were proud to know him. As he moved through the streets of the cities, wondering multitudes came forth to gaze upon the mighty conqueror of a new world.

Daily were honors of state and court bestowed upon the champion of Spanish chivalry. The monarch conferred with pride orders and titles upon him; and not only old Spain, but all Europe rang with the name of Hernando Cortes. His glorious achievements and prodigies of valor were the theme of every courtly circle, and when he was prepared to depart once more for the shores of the realm whose entire government was given

to him, multitudes assembled to cry, "God and the Virgin safely speed the great Cortes to the new kingdom of the west."

He came again to Mexico and gathered a brilliant court about him, amid which shone, like a star, the handsome and valiant knight, Don Pedro de Alvarado, who had brought a bride, young and beautiful, from his father-land.

Time passed on, and Alvarado grew weary of still being second to the distinguished Cortes—so, bidding farewell to his commander, he departed into Guatemala, where he fitted out with his great wealth a fleet of thirteen beautiful ships, with which he confidently hoped to find, in the untraversed waste of the great Pacific, some other new world, which would afford a field worthy of the conquest of Alvarado. But a volcano in that strange land burst forth suddenly, and a torrent of fire and mud buried the village which he had built, and in the overwhelming deluge was lost his young and lovely bride.

Scarce had this terrific blow fallen upon him, when he heard of a friend in jeopardy from the fierce native foes, and he flew to rescue him;—but the knight who had breasted a hundred storms never returned! Thus perished the proud Alvarado, whom the Aztecs had surnamed the "Sun," from his splendid and shining figure in the field.

Thus scattered, in Spain and America, the various members of that wonderful company of adventurers disappeared, and died all poor! after having robbed the treasure-house of the world!

Thus does flattering fortune, fickle as she is in the long run, make ill-gotten wealth melt in the holder's hand.

Upon the conqueror, in person, she heaped riches and power—but happiness made not her home in his heart. Around him, in all their gorgeousness, were the gilded emblems of riches, but poor indeed was the spirit before whom this splendid pageant was spread.

Glory had sounded his name upon her trumpet to the ears of the world, but heavily it echoed through his heart. While others praised his almost miraculous exploits, the hero pined, and heard the voice of laudation with pain. The blazing Cross which he had borne, was bloody; his golden banner blushed with a crimson stain, and the high mass which made the new and

rich cathedrals ring, sounded heavy and mournful in his ears.

He had now established the objects of his ambition: fortune, power, and religion—a fortune, where gold glared upon him at every step, dazzling and oppressive—a power, which afforded no pleasure to exercise or wield—a religion, that gave the soul no rest, whose absolution was a hollow form, and satisfied not the stings of conscience and the misgivings of a guilty mind.

Though he lifted the spire of a cathedral to the clouds, it would not atone for a single low hut of a poor Aztec fisherman, burnt ruthlessly by the margin of the blue Tezeuco. Like that bitter drug, one drop of which impregnates a thousand gallons of water, did the memory of each single wrongful action embitter every hour of his meditation.

Like a corse arrayed in costly apparel, a dead king, shrouded in his robes of state, was Hernando Cortes. Around him now teemed all things that seemed desirable, but the heart of enjoyment was dead and cold within him. As a sick man turns away from the rarest viands, his appetite lost, so, tasteless and loathsome, became all objects for which he had toiled.

He had climbed to the pinnacle of the mountain of power, and the atmosphere chilled him to the core. The illusions of his life were as icebergs, which glittered with rainbow splendors in the distance, and froze him when he touched their bright but icy beauties.

Thus, life with him had been a night of brilliant and hopeful dreams; but when the grey dawn of reality broke upon him, all that was beautiful became bleak, and the rosy troop of hours that danced in the Eden of the coming time, upon a bed of blossoms, changed to sheeted spectres, who moved to solemn phantom dirges and death marches, amid the tombstones of many graves.

Gold and glory, like two marble statues, stood in his palace-hall, but the bright-eyed twin angels, hope and happiness, opened his portal, and passed out forever!

Deep was the gloom that shrouded his greatness. There was no sunlight around him; the glad and natural beams of bliss blessed not his sight, but his soul dwelt in a dark cavern, illumined by an unearthly lustre from a sun of gold, spotted with a nation's blood!

The night-wind which swept over the silent waters of Tezcuco, bore through the valley the wail of many voices, and even amid the clear hours of the brightest noon, sorrowing spirits sighed in his ear as he passed, and whispered their melancholy tales in his unwilling hearing. False was the human maxim which said that "dead men tell no tales;" even amidst crowds the sufferer could hear them, when all the multitude beside were deaf.

Deathless conscience revived the pictures of the past, and as memory unrolled the canvas, bloody deeds were shadowed forth in all their terror, and pallid horrors became immortal!

* * * * *

Aztec Mexico was no more—for a new ruler made a new realm;—a conqueror held it as his capital and court—a conqueror with the titles of lord and marquis; in himself an emperor, in state, power, and magnificence; and where the black smoke rolled up from the pagan Teocallis to the blue skies, the yellow glittering spire of a Christian Cathedral now shot aloft in the sunshine, and the splendid throne of the line of the Montezumas made way for the regal chair of the Castilian Cortes.

For years he held this lofty state—years of exalted misery and uneasy eminence. Avarice and ambition, the twin spirits of his heart, brought their stores to his feet, and he drew forth, as from Pandora's box, all the glittering gems which dazzle earthly vision; but when the casket was searched to the bottom, the long-looked for jewels of happiness and contentment were gone—the satisfying talisman of content, which the eye of expectancy beheld blazing, like the polar star upon the horizon of the future, proved a phosphoric and evanescent wild-fire, which led the deceived soul into pit-falls, bogs and quicksands; and the halcyon shell of happiness, which rode the silver waves of a sea of promise, furlled its fairy sails in the sunshine, and sank to rise no more.

The syren, whose spell had lured the heart of Hernando Cortes from the path of virtue and mercy, and wooed him with her rosy lips to meet her extatic embrace, changed suddenly as the shape of Actæon, and became a pillar of ice in his arms!—and thus, even amid all the proudest pleasures of existence, the spectre of woe haunted him, and distress destroyed the promised bliss of being.

But why dwell thus in the shadowy land of sorrow? The conqueror, sick of his gilded glories, turns for the last time to his native land, and in the fair city of Cuesta, the load of life grown wearisome, is laid down, and the spirit departs to answer for its actions in its house of clay, which it had inhabited for two and sixty years.

The body which had received such earthly favors in life, was not unhonored in its ashes. In the beautiful chapel of the great and powerful Duke of Medina Sidonia, the mortal remains were deposited—and in after years, when the wondrous deeds of the triumphant Cavalier of the Cross were yet the wonder and admiration of Europe, the Spanish powers transferred the mouldering remains of this hero of Spanish history, from his native shore, to the land of his conquest, and in the Mexican city of Tezcuco, by the matchless lake of beauty, stood a temple crowned with the Cross and within its sacred precincts the dust was deposited, with all the solemn gorgeousness of procession, mass, and mournful anthem, and amid the trophies which decorated the sacred aisles, were rare relics, and chief among them shone his own crest of arms, a chain, inwrought with the heads of seven kings, whom he had conquered.

And there sleeps the chief of the conquerors of the Golden Realm.

* * * * *

In the heart of Guatemala, where cities of a forgotten people lay buried under the mould of ages, and overshadowed by the impenetrable verdure, lay a bright lake of silver, the transparent Tayasal. Around its margin spread a wilderness, where ancient ruins, half hidden, lifted their mossy and shattered columns among the great trunks of monster trees.

In the centre of this round and shining sheet of water, smiled a sweet little green isle, and from it a tall, snow-white palace reared its polished pillars aloft in the face of the purple skies of that southern clime. Upon this Elysian island a second Eden bloomed, where lavish nature exhausted her gorgeous store of beauties; where the strange tree stood, whose leafy boughs, in the golden blaze of noon, distilled perpetually a perfumed dew, and softly showered ambrosial sweetness from its cool,

refreshing leaves ; where the crimson cactus, with its snake-like folds, held up its open cups to catch those delicious dews as they dropped from the overhanging trees ; where dancing dahlias nodded their many-colored heads, and the brilliant roses blushed in their wild beauty ; where butterflies, with gold-barred bodies and bright crimson wings, fluttered through the air, or touched on flowers with their velvet feet, and from the trumpets of the blossoms sucked the hidden nectar.

In the midst of greenest trees, the blazing bodies of parrots and macaws gleamed like scarlet fires, or flashed blue as burnished steel. And like winged fairies of the air, green and shining humming-birds glanced along swifter than the sunbeams through which they darted.

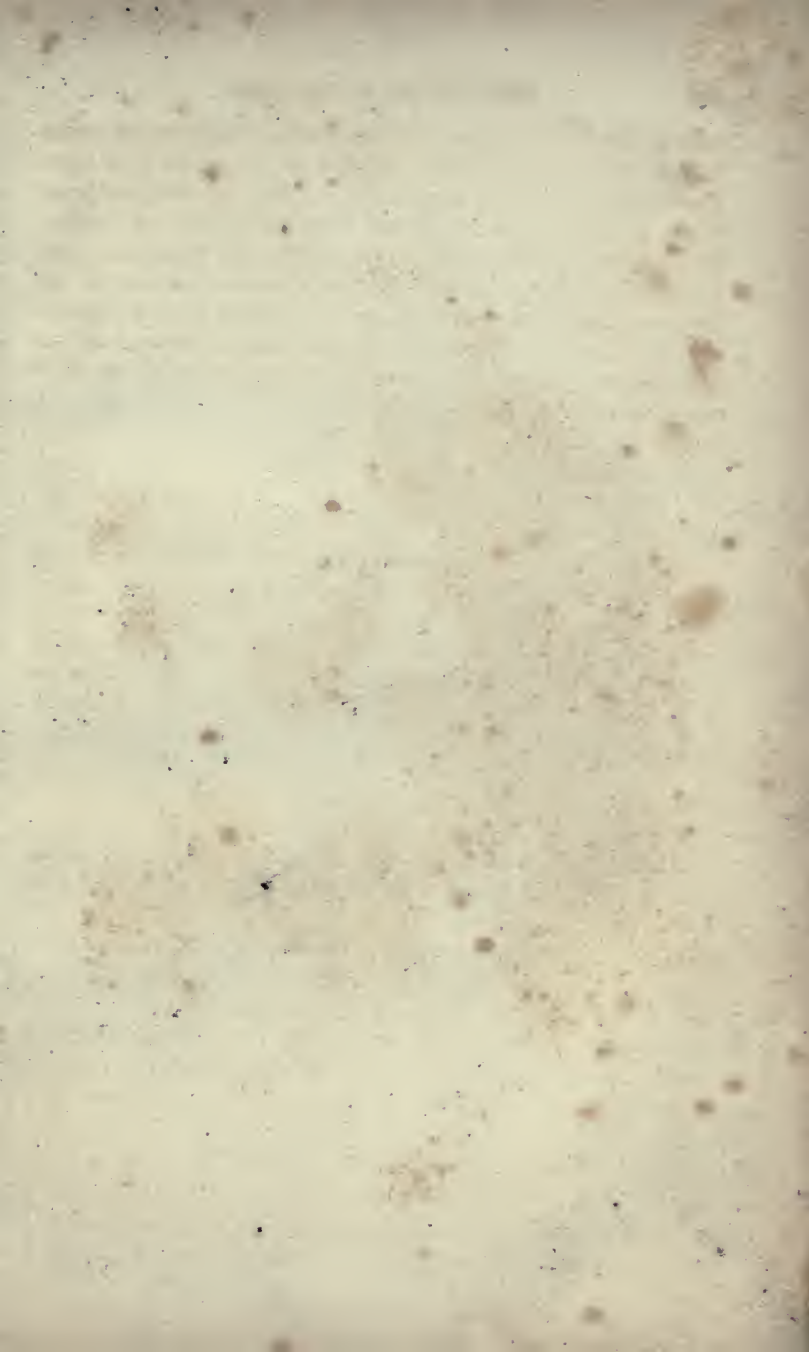
When the spangled veil of night floated along the sky, and its starry gems flashed down their radiance on the sable forest, or the pearl-faced moon looked at her image in the lake, until the loving waters smiled beneath her glance, the magical mocking-bird would awaken his song of enchantment, and like a chorus of vestals at vespers, voices would break forth from every bush and dark vanilla bower, until the silent air became alive with a thousand tongues of music, warbling an ever-changing hymn of harmony.

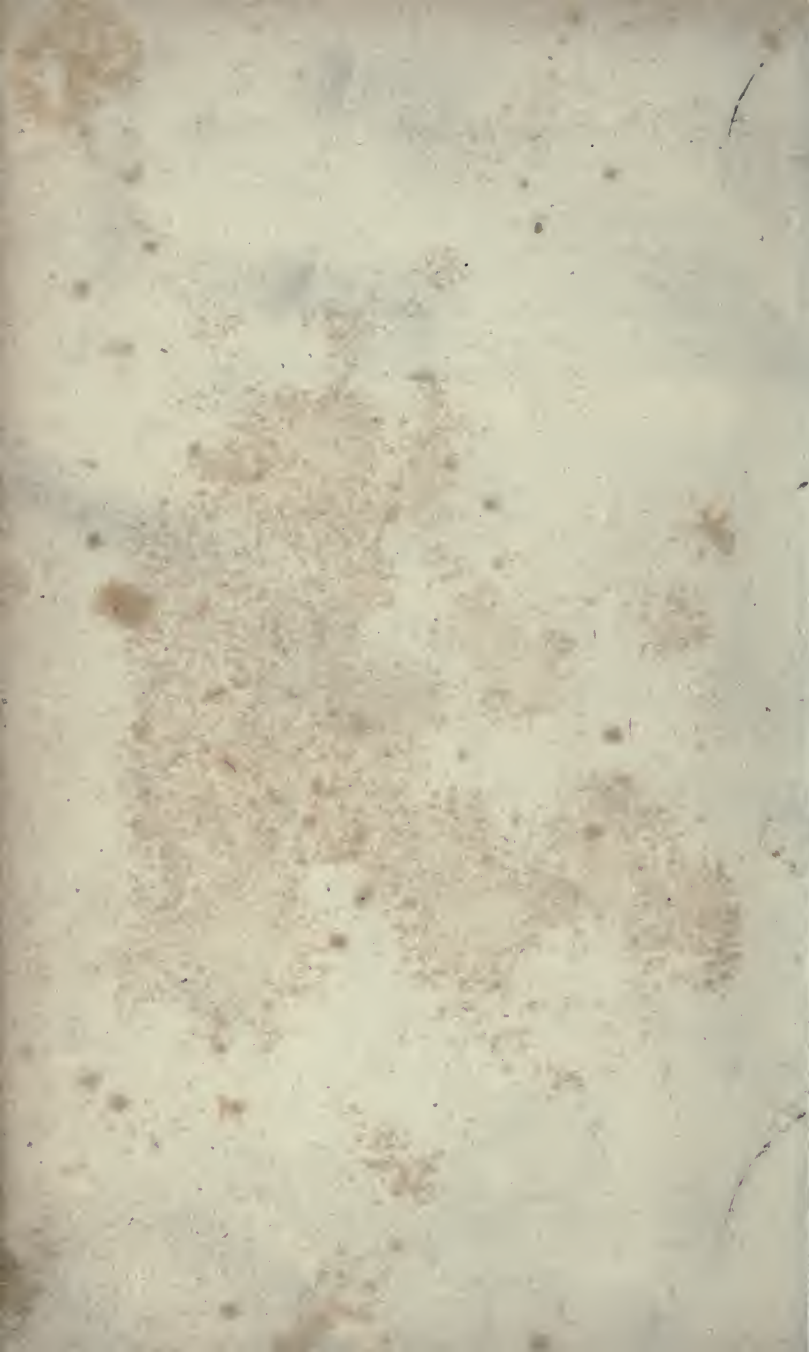
Within that snow-white palace, Love and Joy made their dwelling-place. It was not the rare and measureless wealth which made those chambers blaze with beauty and magnificence, which won Love and Joy to dwell within its walls ;—it was not the bright-tinted pictures which decorated each chamber, the solemn and chaste statues which stood in their quiet niches, nor the illuminated folios whose gilded rows filled many a spacious recess ;—but it was one sacred volume, clasped with gold and studded with diamonds—the mystic Book of Revelation, whose precepts the dwellers in that palace delighted in—that made angel-eyed Love and sunny-faced Joy rove hand in hand through those happy halls.

Of mortals, but three had their homes therein—one, a bright-visaged dwarf, with nestling, nut-brown curls, who, with a lute-like instrument, played exquisite strains, as he gazed up into the faces of the twain at whose feet he sat. Of these, one was a

woman, beautiful as the rare hand of nature could mould her in form and feature ; and as the cunning painters of antiquity portrayed angels, light was all around her, and sunshine in her face ; her head rested upon the broad shoulders of one upon whose glorious and majestic face her upturned orbs were fixed, and from his dark and unfathomable eyes a quiet smile looked out like a mermaid from her ocean cave. And over the pair a spirit's eye might see spread out the rainbow wings of Happiness, the angel whose radiant countenance illumined the home of MALMIZTIC—THE LAST OF THE TOLTECS.

THE END.





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